A CADET of BELGIUM

Captain Allan Grant

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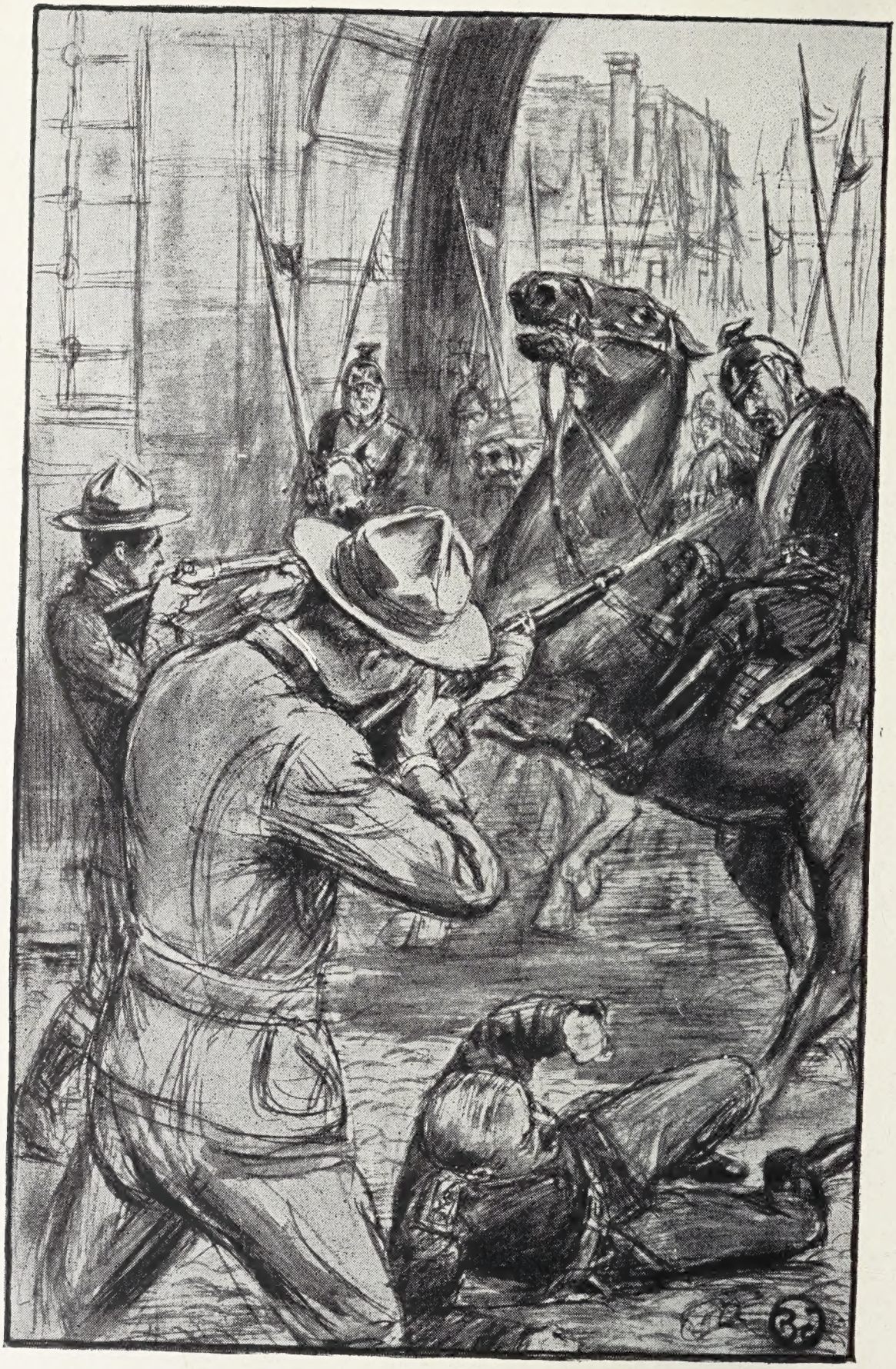

THEY EMPTIED THEIR MAGAZINES
AS FAST AS THEY COULD PULL THE TRIGGER

A CADET OF BELGIUM

A STORY OF CAVALRY DARING —BICYCLE AND ARMORED AUTOMOBILE ADVENTURES

BY

CAPTAIN ALLAN GRANT

Author of "In Defence of Paris"
"Fifty Feet Under the Sea"
etc., etc.

Illustrated by Bayard Jones

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CHAPTER I

THE BOYS OF LIÈGE

"Less noise, boys, less noise!" exclaimed Monsieur Heilleprin, as he looked up over his newspaper, and Madame Heilleprin, stout and motherly, enthroned behind the coffee-pot, added a warning "Ssh!"

But as this was a regular morning incident neither their son Raoul nor Jack Morton, his American chum, heeded the admonitions, except to mumble "excuse me," as they slid into their chairs and resumed their regular morning dispute.

"I say you were first out of bed," declared Jack, attacking his omelette.

"No, not by half a minute," returned Raoul, with a chuckle. "Don't you remember, you tried to pull the blanket off me?"

"Well, anyway, I was down stairs first," asserted Jack.

"Boys, boys!" protested Monsieur Heilleprin

again, and this time both noticed that he sounded really worried.

"Why, what's the matter, father?" asked Raoul, looking up from his coffee. "We didn't mean to annoy you. It's only that Jack will never admit that I can dress faster than he."

Monsieur Heilleprin laid down his paper with a sigh.

"I am afraid you will not have many more such contests, then," he said.

It was Jack's turn to look up.

"Father hasn't——" he began.

"No, Jack, this has nothing to do with your father. But the paper this morning says that Germany has addressed an ultimatum to Belgium, and Liège is scarcely the place for you until better times come."

Both boys dropped their forks and spoons and stared at him. Madame Heilleprin began to weep softly.

"Why, sir, what does that mean?" asked Jack.

Raoul, Belgian-born himself, did not need to ask.

"I am afraid it means war, Jack," returned Monsieur Heilleprin sadly. "Ever since this war-cloud broke over Europe scarcely a week ago, I

have feared Belgium would become involved in it.''

''But what has Belgium got to do with any row between Germany and France and the rest of 'em?'' demanded Jack practically. ''Belgium hasn't done anything to anybody, has she?''

''No, my boy, but unfortunately the man who governs Germany to-day has no respect for any peaceful, well-disposed people who may stand in the path of his ambition. The German Emperor has embroiled himself in war with Russia and France, and I fear many more nations will be involved before he is beaten—as beaten he must be. If he hopes to win he must strike quickly and take advantage of the superior organization of his army. But it would be hopeless for him to try to force a passage across the French frontier where it touches his own territory, because the French have erected a chain—in fact, several chains—of immense fortresses guarding the roads. So what he has decided to do is to attempt to cross Belgium and penetrate France at a point where her frontier is practically unprotected. Do you see what I mean? And so he has sent this ultimatum to our good King Albert demanding free passage across Belgium, and threatening us with war and all its terrors, if we refuse him.''

"What a cheap sort of a beast he must be!" exclaimed Jack, disdainfully. "Why, I should think his own people would turn against him. Belgium has never done a thing to Germany. She just minds her own business—and I know my father says she does better on less means than any country in Europe."

"I am afraid, Jack, you overestimate the German nation's love of fair-play," answered Monsieur Heilleprin. "Germany has always desired a longer coast-line on the North Sea, and she thinks this is her chance to get it. Of course, she guaranteed our neutrality along with England and France in a treaty signed years ago; but to break a treaty one has only to break one's word—and that will not weigh heavy on a German statesman. No, war is inevitable, for it is unthinkable that our King would grant the Kaiser's demands; it would mean our annihilation as a nation. We must fight, and our only hope is that England will stand by the treaty to which she is pledged and defend us against these German treaty-breakers."

"Good for Belgium!" announced Jack. "You can be sure America will be on your side."

"I hope so, Jack, I hope so. And now we must think of your case. In times such as loom ahead of us, Liège would be no place for you, and I

should not be doing my duty by your father if I did not take precautions to get you out of danger.''

Jack sat up very straight in his chair.

''Danger?'' he repeated. ''Why, how can we be in any danger in Liège—even if there is a war?''

''You forget the forts.'' Monsieur Heilleprin pointed out the wide French window, which was open and disclosed a magnificent view of the valley of the Meuse River and in the far distance the first masses of the Ardennes Forest. Off to the left Fort Flémelle, one of the strongest in the line of fortresses defending Liège, towered on its hill above the river.

''Liège will probably be the first point in Belgium the Germans will try to capture—indeed, they will not be able to invade our country until they have reduced these forts. We shall be besieged, perhaps bombarded. And nobody can tell when the blow will fall.''

''What will you and Madame Heilleprin do—and Raoul, and the servants, and the hands at the factory?''

''We must make the best of it. We are Belgians. For myself, all the property I own is here in Liège, and I must look after it.''

''Then I think I ought to stay with you,'' pro-

tested Jack stanchly. "I'm sure father would want me to."

Monsieur Heilleprin forgot his troubles sufficiently to laugh.

"I am afraid that is a case of the wish being father to the thought," he said. "No, Jack, as a matter of fact, I shall look around to-day and endeavor to discover a good way to get you home."

"Would it not be better, Marcelle, for us all to go to England for a time?" suggested Madame Heilleprin fearfully. "What good will it do you to stay here if the Germans come? They will not be prevented from burning the factory by your presence. You have funds in England. Surely we could get along on them until this trouble is over. It cannot last so long."

Monsieur Heilleprin shook his head.

"I am not so sure, wife," he said. "We are on the threshold of the greatest war and the greatest disaster which the world has ever known. No man can say how it will go or where or when it will end. But your idea is worth remembering, and, if matters do become insupportable, why, then, I dare say, we can all find an asylum in hospitable Britain."

He turned to the boys again.

"I do not want you boys to look at this prospect

thoughtlessly," he continued. "War and fighting are exciting, but they are not justifiable if they can possibly be avoided. Remember that, as I said, not only the fate of Belgium, but the fate of all Europe, of civilization itself—perhaps, Jack, even the fate of your own United States—is at stake. It is a serious state of affairs. Now, I must be off to the factory. I suppose I shall see you later when your lessons are ended."

Jack and Raoul followed Monsieur Heilleprin from the dining-room with serious faces. It was not quite time for their tutor to arrive, so they walked out into the gardens that fronted on the little valley dominated by the guns of Fort Flémelle on its hilltop. Jack Morton was a sturdy, rather stockily-built chap of sixteen, the only son of Cyrus Morton, the American mine owner. Ever since the death of his mother, Jack had lived an adventurous life with his father, traveling wherever business required Mr. Morton's presence, and in the course of his brief life he had seen as much of the world as many men twice his age.

A year before, however, after their return from a dangerous trip into central Mexico, where a siege of their hacienda by some of Villa's men had been one of the least of their experiences, Mr. Morton had decided that it was time to begin

the serious education of his son. Some fathers would have sent the boy off to an Eastern boarding-school to prepare for the four years of the college course that form the usual training for business and the serious things of existence. But Mr. Morton was an unusual man, and he had unusual ideas. He wanted Jack to be brought up in close touch with practical affairs.

So instead of sending him to school and college Mr. Morton arranged to have him reside in the family of his friend and business associate, Monsieur Marcelle Heilleprin, proprietor of a great gun factory at Liège. The arrangement turned out satisfactory to all concerned. In Monsieur Heilleprin's son Raoul, Jack had a companion of his own age; the two lads spent a part of the day in studies with a tutor, and a certain number of hours in the factory, where they were taught the business from the first stages; and the rest of the time they fared to suit themselves, boating on the broad reaches of the Meuse, tramping through the beautiful wilderness of the Ardennes Forest, or riding on their motor-cycles over the excellent Belgian roads into prim little Holland, only a few miles distant to the north, or precise Germany, which was practically just across the river from Liège. It was a healthy sort of life, with lots of

out-doors mixed into a broad-gauged program of study that was always interesting.

"I don't realize I'm learning things," Jack wrote in a letter to his father a few days before this morning's interview at the breakfast table. "Why, I speak French so well already that people on the street have stopped smiling and calling me 'M'sieur le'Americaine.' "

And although Jack did not realize it, all the time he was learning the ins and outs of the important Belgian ends of his father's business, so that in the course of a few years he would be able to take a place at Mr. Morton's side as an efficient assistant, without any annoying preliminary course of training—which was exactly what his father desired.

Of course, on the other hand, Jack would not have gotten along so well as he did if it had not been that Monsieur and Madame Heilleprin were so kind to him, and that he and Raoul, despite the difference in their nationality, were able to hit it off in splendid fashion. Raoul joined readily with him in everything that proved interesting. Like Jack, he had been an enthusiastic Boy Scout, and boasted with him the right to wear the Star Scout badge. Jack, however, was perhaps

the more experienced of the two, and that was one reason why he was chosen leader of the Gray Wolf Patrol, which they had recently formed. Naturally, Raoul was made assistant leader.

They were very much alike in tastes, but physically quite different, for Raoul was dark and slim, where Jack was fair and stocky. Jack was quick in decision, impulsive, self-confident, a natural-born leader. Raoul was inclined to think before acting, deliberate and better as a counselor than as a leader. The result was that when they pooled forces they proved themselves a formidable team, as all the members of the Gray Wolf Patrol agreed.

"Gosh!" said Jack, as they stood on the terrace and looked out over the suburbs of the city toward the industrial quarter, which bristled with the chimneys of the factories that made it so prosperous. "That doesn't look like war, does it, Raoul?"

The Belgian shook his head.

"No," he answered, "and yet, Jack, ever since I can remember, I have heard people talking about the day the Germans would come. Everybody seemed to think it was bound to happen some day, and I suppose they have been expect-

ing it so long that it's just like you say—we can't believe it possible. Hark! What's that?"

They both listened. Faintly, the clangor of church-bells reached their ears from the city's heart. Even while they listened the bell of a church a half mile farther down the river took up the peal.

"They don't ring the church-bells for fires, do they?" asked Jack, puzzled. "What's——"

"It's the tocsin," replied Raoul quietly, "the call for the general mobilization. It means that every man who is eligible for military service must report himself at once."

"Phew! That looks as if the King had told the Kaiser he could go to thunder."

Raoul smiled.

"I suppose whatever he said meant just about that—although kings are always very dignified, even when they get mad."

"Well, whatever his message was, here comes Monsieur Jemard," announced Jack, "and that means lessons will begin. I guess we'll have to study, no matter what happens."

Their tutor, Monsieur Jemard, a young Belgian graduate of the great University of Louvain, which Jack and Raoul were to visit later under conditions that would make them remember it all

their lives, came hurrying across the terrace toward them.

"Ah, boys," he called before he had reached them. "I have a message for you which I fancy will call forth satisfaction as well as surprise. The Germans are coming and my class of reserves has been called out, so you must go lessonless."

"Do you mean you're going to fight?" demanded Jack a little breathlessly—it seemed pretty hard to imagine scholarly Monsieur Jemard, with his eye-glasses and precise, pleasant speech, a real soldier carrying a sword.

"Yes," returned the tutor. "You know, I am a lieutenant in the reserve battalion of the 14th infantry of the line. We shall be called upon to assist in the defense of the forts. I have time only to say good-by and God bless you."

He shook hands with them, smiling in order that the moment should not seem too serious. But to both boys it came with something of a shock.

"Good-by, sir," they said soberly.

Monsieur Jemard was well on his way to the gate out of the grounds, before Jack remembered an important question he had wished to ask him.

"Oh, Monsieur Jemard," he shouted. "Mon-

sieur Jemard, have you heard when the Germans are coming?''

The tutor paused with one hand on the latch.

''At any moment,'' he said. ''It is impossible to say. They are already in France. They may be here to-morrow, possibly even to-day.''

And he was gone, striding along the road that led into the city; and as the boys watched they saw a motley procession of men, laborers, clerks, factory hands, artisans, doctors, lawyers, even clergymen, thronging toward the city in response to the command of the bells. Liège was making ready to meet the oncoming Germans.

Jack thrust his hands into his pockets and gulped hard.

''Look here, Raoul,'' he said. ''Of course, we're only boys, but it seems to me in a time like this we ought to try to help. Every man is going to count in this fight, and there must be some work we can do so's a few men can be spared for more important work.''

''That's true,'' Raoul agreed. ''I know you have a plan, Jack, so out with it. You needn't worry about our not having time for it. With the mobilization call issued, father will be closing up his factory this very minute. All of his

younger men will be taken. There'll be no more work for us—until the Germans are beaten."

"My plan is to use the patrol," said Jack. "What do you think of it? There are eight of us—not many, perhaps, but we've all got motorcycles or bicycles, and I should think we could carry messages at any rate."

"Fine!" exclaimed Raoul. "That's just the thing. We are supposed to make ourselves useful in an emergency, and I guess there isn't any disputing that this is an emergency."

"No, sir," declared Jack. "And our motto is 'Be Prepared!' remember. So it's up to us to be prepared for whatever may happen and for anything we can do. Now, what's the best way to go about it?"

Raoul considered.

"Well," he said at last, "I suppose the first thing to do is to telephone the other fellows. Then we'd best get into our uniforms, and ride into town and report to the Burgomaster, or whoever is in command."

An hour and a half later the leader and assistant leader of the Gray Wolf Patrol had brought the six boys of their organization together on the road in front of Raoul's house, and Jack was issuing directions for the march into town.

"Fill your canteens, first," he ordered. "Did you all bring your lunches? That's right. I guess we won't need our staffs if we're used as messengers. We can leave them here. All ready? March."

One of the boys besides Jack and Raoul owned a motor-cycle; the other five had bicycles. The patrol covered the distance into the central part of the city in short time, although the streets were beginning to clog with processions of people fleeing from the open country in fear of German raiders. Raoul learned from a gendarme that special headquarters had been opened in the Town Hall, and so the boys directed their steps in that direction, riding very slowly and carefully through the press of vehicles and panic-stricken country-folk.

A block from the Town Hall they were fortunate enough to encounter Monsieur Heilleprin in his automobile. He hailed them, and upon learning their object expressed his hearty approval.

"That is good, boys," he said. "Be useful. I have shut up the factory. All my best men have been taken for the army. There is nothing for anybody to do except to help in the defense of our city. Jack, I don't know what to do about you. I have tried to get hold of someone with

whom you could travel to England, or at least into Holland. But in this confusion I have been unable to find any trustworthy person. I hear the German Uhlans have crossed the frontier, and I should not care to let you go unless I was certain you were safe."

As he waved good-by to them they resumed their progress toward the Town Hall.

"Gosh, I hope he doesn't find anybody going to England," Jack confided to Raoul. "I want to stay and see something of this war."

They were obliged to dismount in front of the Town Hall, and leaving their machines in the care of one of their number, the rest edged their way through crowds of soldiers and excited citizens in the direction of the Burgomaster's office. They were stopped at the door of an anteroom by an official, who after a considerable delay passed them in to the Burgomaster's secretary.

"Well, boys, what is it?" asked that functionary somewhat impatiently.

"We are the Gray Wolf Patrol," answered Jack, saluting. "We thought we might be useful as messengers."

"I will present your application to the Burgomaster," said the secretary. "But he is very

"WE ARE THE GREY WOLF PATROL," ANSWERED JACK

busy and you may have to wait some time. You had better sit down."

As a matter of fact, though, it was only a couple of minutes after the secretary had disappeared behind the double-doors that led into the Burgomaster's private office before he appeared again, beckoning them to follow him.

In single file, with Jack at their head, the boys entered a wide, high chamber which was comfortably filled with high officers in uniform and civil administrators and officials in frock-coats. One of these latter bustled over to the boys with hand outstretched.

"I am the Burgomaster," he said. "Boys, I heard your request for service with a pleasure which I cannot express in words. I wish all of the grown citizens of our city had the spirit and the patriotism you demonstrate. Come with me. I wish to present you to General Leman, our Military Governor, who will doubtless be glad to avail himself of your offer."

Jack felt a little uncomfortable at the attention showered upon his party in consequence of the Burgomaster's demonstration, but he managed not to show it, and followed the official—who was what in America would be called the Mayor of Liège—to a table at the head of which sat a sol-

dierly looking man in the uniform of a lieutenant-general.

"One moment, General, if you please," said the Burgomaster. "I have here eight young gentlemen of Liège who have offered themselves as messengers to assist in the defense of our city. They form the Gray Wolf Patrol, a splendid organization devised for their physical well being and for the useful occupation of their spare time."

Gen. Leman rose to his feet and returned the salute of the boys. They saw his eyes glance keenly over each, inspecting their equipment, summarizing their faces. And each one felt his backbone stiffen involuntarily as the glance was focused on him.

"Young gentlemen," said the general gravely, "you have furnished an excellent and timely example. I cannot resist thinking that if the younger sons of Belgium respond so readily to her call we shall ultimately win against our foes. I shall be glad to assign you to my Adjutant for service as dispatch-bearers, and you will draw your subsistence at the Headquarters mess. You may consider yourselves Cadets of Belgium."

Then the general turned to a younger officer beside him and whispered some instructions; and presently the young officer led them out of the

Burgomaster's office to a corner of the courtyard where long lines of saddle-horses were picketed and a detachment of lancers lounged in the sun.

"Make yourselves at home here," he said cheerfully. "For to-day we are getting along as best we can. Later we will have more ship-shape headquarters. Bring your machines in here, and stand prepared to carry any dispatches I may send out to you."

The Boys of the Gray Wolf Patrol surveyed each other with increased respect. They had become Cadets of Belgium.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF THE GERMANS

The Boys of the Gray Wolf Patrol were a tired lot when they were lined up for dismissal in the courtyard of the Town Hall that evening. They had ridden all over the area lying within the fortifications, carrying messages, guiding detachments of reservists to their new posts, performing a dozen different kinds of errands.

"You have done well, boys," said Captain Montjuit, the young adjutant of General Leman, under whose orders they had worked. "You have been true sons of Belgium to-day. Now, I want you to go home and get to bed early so that you will be fresh to-morrow. Report here at seven o'clock in the morning."

The boys saluted and filed out into the street; but as the others disappeared through the archway, Captain Montjuit signaled Jack and Raoul to wait.

"I know you are as tired as your friends," he said kindly. "But there is a special piece of serv-

ice under way that I thought you might care to have a share in. What do you say?''

Despite the tiredness that made their limbs sore and their heads heavy, Jack and Raoul straightened at the first hint of excitement to come that was contained in the officer's voice. Jack looked at Raoul and Raoul nodded back to Jack.

''We're ready, sir,'' returned Jack promptly. ''I should say so. Why, I feel fine. Don't you, Raoul?''

The Belgian lad nodded.

''I'm afraid I'll have to examine you two for truthfulness,'' laughed Captain Montjuit. ''If I had done as much hard work as you have to-day I'd be a fit subject for the Red Cross people to work on. However, I shall see that you get some rest, even though it will be impossible for you to go home to-night. Come with me.''

He led them to his office, a small room off the courtyard. There were several cots in it, besides a desk and chairs. On the desk was a telephone.

''You shall share my quarters,'' he continued. ''Now, the first thing to do is to telephone your family where you are. Then I will send an orderly with some supper, and after that I recommend you to lie down. I am not at liberty to tell

you the precise kind of service I have in view, but it will probably be necessary for you to be up shortly after midnight. By the way, be sure your motor-cycles are in condition and your tanks are filled. There'll be no time to look after such details before we start."

"What do you suppose we're going to do, now?" said Jack after he had gone.

"It won't do us any good to guess," answered Raoul practically. "All the soldiers I spoke to to-day didn't know why they were doing whatever they had been ordered to do. They said that was the way it was in war—and good soldiers don't ask questions."

They called up Monsieur Heilleprin, and while he was somewhat dismayed at the idea of their being away all night, he was appeased when he heard that they were attached to General Leman's staff.

"Be careful, boys," he warned them, "and do not take any chances. It is not brave to take chances that are unnecessary."

Soon after this an orderly brought in a tray of steaming food direct from the table of the headquarters mess, and this occupied the boys' attention for the next fifteen minutes. Then they had their machines to oil and the tanks to fill from

the barrels of gasolene placed in one corner of the yard for the automobiles used by the general and his staff. By this time their eyes were closing up on them, and they staggered into Captain Montjuit's little room and fell on two of the cots, scarcely conscious of their actions.

It seemed to both of them that they had no more than closed their eyes, when they were rudely shaken awake. Jack stirred first and sat up with a yawn, blinking his dazzled eyes before an electric torch which Captain Montjuit had been flashing in his face. The Captain and several other officers who stood behind him were chuckling slightly.

"What's the matter?" demanded Jack, who had forgotten all about his military duties. "Can't you let a fellow sleep?"

Captain Montjuit broke into a hearty laugh.

"Have you forgotten the service you were going to assist me in?" he replied.

Jack sprang to his feet very much abashed.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, hunting for his cap on the floor. "I was so dead asleep I didn't——" He turned on Raoul, who was having even more difficulty than himself in getting awake. "Get up, sleepy-head," he ordered, administering a good shaking to his drowsy chum.

All the officers were laughing now.

"Never mind, boys," advised one. "We were all as bad as you when the orderlies waked us twenty minutes ago. Early morning campaigning is the hardest of all."

"What time is it?" asked Raoul as the group began to move out of the room.

"Half-past one," answered Captain Montjuit. "And we shall be on the march in ten minutes. Bring along your machines."

Outside, the courtyard was crammed with cyclist troops and motor-cycle boys, together with a number of automobiles, some of which were armored and carried machine-guns. In the flashing arc-lights that formed the only illumination the scene was weird in the extreme. The men were perfectly silent and the only noise was made by puffing motors. Captain Montjuit and the other officers walked out of the courtyard and up the street toward where the head of the column lay, Jack and Raoul trundling their motor-cycles after them.

Presently they reached an empty automobile and the officers climbed in. Captain Montjuit paused on the step to say a few words to the boys.

"We are going out to watch for the Germans,"

he explained. "I shall have to use you boys to send back word of the progress they are making. You are to ride directly behind this car and be careful not to lose it."

He climbed up beside the driver. A bugler in the tonneau sounded a call, and then the long column started, automobile exhausts throbbing, motors panting and the cylinders of the motor-cycle engines spitting impatiently at the slow rate of speed in the narrow streets of the city.

"Gosh," muttered Jack to Raoul riding beside him. "This is a mighty queer kind of war. I suppose this is cavalry, but I've always thought of cavalry riding on horses—and there isn't a horse in the whole outfit."

"And only yesterday morning we were waiting for Monsieur Jemard to come and hear our lessons," replied Raoul, with a chuckle.

Jack felt a mighty resolve throbbing in his brain.

"Raoul," he exclaimed, drawing as close as he dared in the dust that blew back from the flying wheels of the car just ahead, "I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to stay and see something of this war. I'm sure my father wouldn't disapprove of it, either. He always said he didn't care what I did so long as it made a man of me,

and I should think this would be as good a way as any other."

"If you stay, I'll stay," answered Raoul. "We'll have to stick together, Jack."

"Right, old scout," agreed Jack. And he managed to reach out across his handle-bars and exchange a clasp with Raoul in the dark.

But now they were rolling over the Exposition Bridge and swinging into the road that led toward the frontier, and the pilot-car was increasing its speed rapidly, which meant that the boys had to look alive and keep their eyes on the road lest they be dismounted by some cobble or other obstruction—in which case they did not need to be told that they would be ground to pieces by a heavy armored automobile that was following them.

The lamps of Captain Montjuit's car lighted the road to some extent, but in the body of the column it was a case of follow your leader's tail-light and be quick to regulate your speed according to his. Every now and then sentries stepped out from the roadside and challenged, and each time the column slowed and Captain Montjuit leaned from his seat and whispered the pass-word.

"Pass, Friends of Belgium," the sentries

would answer, and promptly they faded away into the shadows of houses or hedges.

Half an hour after starting the column wound out between the towering forts of Chaudfontaine and Fléron. Beyond this point the character of the country changed considerably. It was more open. There were villages at infrequent intervals, and in between them broad fields and comfortable little farm-houses, most of them now dark and deserted, for as a general rule the country people had fled from the frontier district the day before.

Just how long they rode, neither Jack nor Raoul could say, but the false dawn, which comes before the first rays of the sun creep up over the eastern horizon, found them halted on a low hill from which there was an almost uninterrupted view over a rolling plain that stretched away toward the border line. The column was split up and sections of it were sent along side roads to right and left, while one flying squadron of men on fast motor-cycles were dispatched down the main road to reconnoiter the debatable land ahead. But a strong force of cyclists and armored cars were kept just behind the crown of the hill as a reserve.

Captain Montjuit and the officers with him were standing up in his car trying to study the coun-

try ahead of them through field-glasses. They may have been able to see something, but Jack and Raoul, who had dismounted, strained their eyes into the gray light without any avail. As it turned out, though, their ears were a great deal more useful than their eyes.

All of a sudden the officers standing above them became hugely excited.

"There they are!" exclaimed Captain Montjuit. "See their lances bobbing along behind that hedge. I hope—Ah!"

"Pop! Pop! Br-rr-rr-rr-bang! Bang! Bang!"

Jack and Raoul did not need to be told that they were listening to firing, to the first skirmish of the war. Their blood fairly boiled in their veins, and prickles of excitement ran up and down their spines.

"Our people are falling back," said one of the officers.

"Yes," answered Captain Montjuit. "That's according to plan. I told them to lure the Uhlans as near as possible, and then let us attend to the rest. I fancy it's time."

The firing was drawing nearer quite rapidly as the Belgian motor-cyclists retired.

"Armored car Number 7b," called Captain Montjuit.

"Ready, sir," responded the chauffeur of 7b, slipping in his clutch.

The ponderous car, encased in gray-painted steel three-eighths of an inch thick, so that even the tires and the radiator were protected, rolled up alongside the commander.

"Have you got your cartridge-belt ready?" asked Captain Montjuit of the lieutenant in charge of the machine-gun crew who were ensconced in a sort of steel turret where the tonneau of an ordinary automobile would be.

"All ready, sir," replied the lieutenant. "We can let them have six hundred shots a minute as long as they'll stand."

"Go ahead."

There was a straggling cheer as the great car started down the hill, gathering speed with every revolution of the wheels. It was lighter, now, and Jack and Raoul could discern, in the dim morning light, a charging hurricane of horsemen inextricably mixed up with the gallant detachment of Belgian motor-cycle scouts. Pistols and carbines popped as they looked, and the long lance-shafts of the Uhlans dipped and rose.

Then all of a sudden the Uhlans saw the armored car tearing down upon them. For an instant they hesitated, then broke and ran. Some

of them leaped over fences and took to the fields. Others galloped madly back along the road by which they had come. But it mattered little to the men in the car. They swept the country about them with a hail of bullets from their machine-gun and before they halted five miles away, just out of range of the German infantry supports, they had accounted for the better part of a squadron of Uhlans.

"So much for their advance-guard," commented Captain Montjuit. "But we must realize that this is only the beginning. We shall have four or five times as many enemies before us within a couple of hours and a whole army corps by noon. Here, boys, now it is your turn to work."

Jack and Raoul leaped forward and stood at attention, while he hastily scratched a message with his fountain pen.

"I shall need only one of you for this," he said, as he folded it up. "Which shall it be?"

The boys eyed each other.

"Whichever you say, sir," said Raoul at last.

"Very well, then. You take it."

And he handed the dispatch to him.

Raoul saluted, winked a good-by to Jack and

an instant later was tearing back along the road to Liège at thirty miles an hour.

For a while after that nothing happened. The Belgians had occupied all the roads leading toward their city with small patrols, and they kept up a constant communication with each other. From time to time small parties of Uhlans appeared in the distance, but Captain Montjuit's immediate detachment were able to have a comfortable breakfast served from an automobile kitchen which had followed the column. Jack, to his surprise, found that all he had to do was to take the tin cup and plate which had been served out to him the day before, go up to the cooks in charge and get hot coffee, bread and even boiled eggs.

"Gosh," he said to himself. "I thought I was going to war, but the more I see of it the less it seems like what I thought it would be."

It was still early in the morning when the patrols of Uhlans in the distance became stronger and more persistent, and presently dense clouds of dust began to bank up on the horizon. This meant German infantry reinforcements, Jack overheard the Belgian officers telling each other, and he waited to see what would happen next. He did not have to wait for long. The cycle

Scouts who held the roads in the valley immediately under the hill were driven in by forces of cavalry too numerous to be cut up by armored cars; behind a clump of woods several miles to the eastward a battery of field-guns opened fire with a thudding roar and within half an hour after the field-guns began booming, the German infantry appeared, riding in columns of automobile vans, each capable of holding from twenty to fifty men. Wrapped in immense clouds of dust, these lumbering conveyances approached as near as they dared, then disgorged their complement of troops and turned into side roads to return. The result was that within a surprisingly short time the Germans had a heavy skirmish line in action and their infantry fire was lashing the Belgian position even more effectively than their big guns.

Captain Montjuit called Jack aside.

"I have a message for you to take to General Leman," he said. "Tell him the enemy are advancing in force and we are beginning to retire. Tell him they are bringing up their infantry in automobiles and they will be before Liège this afternoon. Go as fast as you can."

Jack speeded off past the motor-kitchens, which had been dispatched to the rear some minutes

previously, as they were no longer needed and could not be moved as rapidly as the rest of the column. He looked back from the top of the next hill and saw that the German shells were bursting with frightful accuracy over the small groups of Belgians who fought to delay their foes for any length of time, no matter how small, in order that the engineers might have opportunity to improve the defenses of the forts.

A few minutes before noon he reached the outposts established beyond the fortifications, and ignoring the appeals for information hurled after him by the soldiers, continued as fast as he dared through the city streets toward the Town Hall.

The guards and secretaries passed him without a murmur, for the uniform of the Gray Wolf Corps had already become known, and in a very short time he found himself standing in the presence of General Leman, repeating the brief message Captain Montjuit had committed to him. Then, in response to the General's questions, the boy told the story of the German advance so far as he had seen it.

"You have done very well, young sir," said the general when Jack had satisfied him. "I shall hope to hear more of you in the future. I thank you."

And Jack passed from the room with his chin held high and a mighty good opinion of himself. He found Raoul waiting for him in the courtyard. "We are to go home, Jack," he said. "One of the general's officers told me we might. But we shall have to be back after dinner. I suppose father and mother won't like it, but so long as it's useful they can't say much."

"Where are the rest of the corps?" asked Jack.

Raoul shrugged his shoulders.

"A couple of the boys were here to-day, but the others have gone with their families. You know everybody is leaving the city who can get on the trains—and lots of others are going on foot."

Jack frowned.

"I hoped the Gray Wolf Corps would all hang together," he said, somewhat crestfallen. "However, we must make the best of it. There's you and I at any rate, Raoul. Say, I hope your mother has a good dinner to-night. I could eat—— Well, I'd hate to have a sample menu in front of me!"

CHAPTER III

JACK SAVES THE GENERAL

"Such boys!" exclaimed stout Mother Heilleprin, after the adventures had been recounted to her. "What will you be doing next? Are there not soldiers to fight Belgium's battles? It is not necessary for boys like you to endanger your lives."

"I am not sure, wife," said Monsieur Heilleprin, who had listened to their story without an interruption. "The more I hear of this iniquitous war that has been forced upon us, the more apparent it becomes to me that we Belgians shall have to strain every nerve to preserve our liberty. There can be no halfway measures against Germany."

Jack clapped his hands.

"Bully for you, sir!" he cried.

Monsieur Heilleprin smiled.

"You may not be so glad to hear what else I have to say, Jack," he replied. "I have about decided to abandon my first plan of remaining

here, and to take you all to Brussels, and possibly Antwerp."

The faces of both boys looked very crestfallen.

"I met the Burgomaster this morning," resumed Monsieur Heilleprin, "and he told me that while they hoped to resist to the last, it must be only a question of time before some of the forts are carried. Many of the big guns which were ordered from the Krupp works in Germany have never been delivered, and consequently the batteries are only half armed."

"But, father," suggested Raoul, "even if you and mother leave Liège, couldn't Jack and I stay and do what we can? We could leave later; the Germans would never take us prisoners."

"It is impossible," Monsieur Heilleprin started to say, but in the middle of his sentence there came a deep-throated boom from the ramparts of Fort Flémalle on its hill by the Meuse scarcely a mile away. Other guns joined in the uproar, and the little party in the dining-room of the Heilleprin villa jumped from their seats and made for the windows. A man was riding by on a bicycle as Monsieur Heilleprin led the way onto the veranda.

"The Germans are in sight!" he yelled over his

shoulder. "Flémalle has just fired upon them in the woods near Poulseur."

In a few minutes the firing ceased from Fort Flémalle, but they could still hear the thunder of heavy ordnance across the sector of the fortifications over toward where Forts Boncelles and Embourg guarded the valley of the Ourthe.

"This is the beginning of the end, I fear," said Monsieur Heilleprin sadly. "Well, wife, we must make haste to prepare to abandon our home. When the Germans open fire on Flémalle their shells will be falling right in our garden."

Jack and Raoul were considerably subdued by the thought that their home—for Jack considered it his home just as much as Raoul—might be reduced to ashes within a few hours, and they busied themselves in assisting Madame Heilleprin and the frightened servants in packing up the silver and valuables. It was arranged that Monsieur and Madame Heilleprin should leave for the city with them in time to catch the late afternoon train, Monsieur Heilleprin engaging first to telephone General Leman's headquarters and explain that he was carrying off the general's Scouts against their will.

As a matter of fact, though, when they neared the railroad station about five o'clock they found

themselves involved in a tremendous mob of people, all bent on fleeing from the threatened city. The booming of cannon and the long, crackling roll of infantry-fire were perfectly distinct even in the heart of the city by this time, and the more nervous element in the population was nearly frantic with fear. It was necessary for Monsieur Heilleprin and the boys, laden down as they were with many valises and bundles, to fight their way toward a side door of the station through which Monsieur Heilleprin knew he could gain admittance by the favor of one of the railroad officials. They reached it after a quarter of an hour's struggle, exhausted and worn out.

"Have you your tickets?" inquired Monsieur Heilleprin's friend as he admitted them.

"Tickets?" repeated Monsieur Heilleprin. "No, I expected to get them here."

"You had better lose no time, then," returned his friend. "Here, look out there."

He led them to a window of his office that looked down upon the train-shed, and Jack and Raoul saw that it was jammed with people as tight as they could stand. The crowds in the street outside were duplicated in here. Families sat in little groups, bundles and bags around them, waiting their turns to climb aboard the trains that

were made up as fast as one special pulled out and left track room for another. Lost children wailed for their parents, old people tottered about looking for friends or protectors. The complaints, lamentations, and farewells resounded like a melancholy chorus of despair.

"You see!" said the railroad man grimly. "All Liège is endeavoring to depart this evening. The third-class coaches are giving out and presently we shall be carrying people in the baggage cars. It is impossible to provide for them all. However, I will go with you and see what I can do."

He led them down to the main floor, and while the boys were left with Madame Heilleprin and the baggage, he and Monsieur Heilleprin went in search of tickets. They returned presently quite discouraged. The agents had stopped selling transportation. Many who had purchased tickets, they said, would be unable to get accommodations. But Monsieur Heilleprin's friend had a happy idea. He hunted up a porter, who in turn hunted up a conductor, and this conductor offered for 100 francs apiece to find room for two persons in a train that was just about to pull out.

"But I have four in my party," remonstrated Monsieur Heilleprin. "Surely, you can make places for two more."

The conductor shook his head.

"In order to get two more on board," he replied, "I shall have to crowd two young fellows out of their standing room in a coach and put them on the engine's tender. I am taking a risk in promising you these two places. Perhaps I could not even do that much."

Monsieur Heilleprin hesitated.

"But I cannot leave these lads."

"You will have to make up your mind quickly, sir," returned the conductor, opening his watch. "I have very little time."

"Don't worry about us, father," Raoul spoke up. "Jack and I can get along all right. We have plenty of money, and we will just wait our chance and come on after you."

"I don't like to think of abandoning you boys here," answered Monsieur Heilleprin reluctantly. "It is too dangerous."

"Nothing could happen to us, sir," urged Jack eagerly. To tell the truth, he scented the prospect of more adventure.

"As a matter of fact," remarked the railroad official at this point, "we have every reason, Monsieur Heilleprin, to believe that railroad transportation should be open for a couple of days yet. I think I can undertake to find trans-

portation for these lads much easier by to-morrow or next day."

"I am sure I don't know what to do," said poor Monsieur Heilleprin.

"Time's almost up," remarked the impatient railroad conductor, whose hand itched for his 200 francs.

"Well, I suppose they are capable of looking after themselves," said Monsieur Heilleprin at last.

Things happened so quickly then that he did not have an opportunity to change his mind. Jack and Raoul picked up the bags and started down the platform after the conductor, who dragged Monsieur Heilleprin with him, shouting that the train would leave any moment; and the railroad official brought up the rear with Madame Heilleprin on his arm. Almost before they knew it the boys found themselves standing alone on the platform, waving good-by to the slow-moving train.

When they turned to wade their way through the crowds of people who still congested the waiting-rooms, Jack smiled at Raoul and Raoul smiled at Jack. In that hurried scramble aboard the last car of the train, Monsieur Heilleprin had found time for several commands, but he had neg-

lected to say anything about their service as Headquarters messengers; and it was this thought that was uppermost in their minds.

"Gosh," said Jack, when they were finally outside in the street again. "Do you know, Raoul, we've just got time to report at Headquarters according to original orders?"

"Come on," answered Raoul. "We'll have to get our motor-cycles, though."

"Yes, but I think we'd better report, first," said Jack. "Then we can explain to Captain Montjuit, or whoever is there, and he'll let us go home for them."

Raoul agreed, and they struck off at a fast gait in the direction of the Town Hall, neither of them realizing for an instant that on this off-hand decision of theirs the immediate fate of Liège had hung—for such was the case, as will be seen.

The streets were not crowded now to anything like the extent that had prevailed earlier in the day. Thousands of people had fled, other thousands were fleeing. Fully half of those who remained were cowering in their cellars in fear of the German bombs that were to become a reality in a short couple of days. Consequently there were few bystanders, other than occasional gendarmes, to watch the ambulances that clanged in

from the outposts where the afternoon's fighting had taken its toll. On a corner near the Town Hall Jack and Raoul halted to watch one of these vehicles go by, with its load of shattered men; and then started to cross the street. As they did so, however, a troop of cavalry trotted out of a cross-street and rode toward them.

There was something peculiar about these troopers, clad in hodden gray, lances swinging in their stirrup-butts. They wore odd helmets that looked something like a scholar's mortar-board.

"I never saw that regiment before, did you?" Jack said to Raoul.

The Belgian lad shook his head.

"They're new to me," he answered.

Then the boys walked on. They had just reached the entrance of the Town Hall, where a sentry lounged idly, when the lancers rode up beside them.

"Where are General Leman's headquarters?" called an officer in careful French.

The sentry looked at him stupidly, and Jack felt a thrill of suspicion dart down his spine.

"Who are you, sir?" he answered as coolly as he could.

The officer shook his reins impatiently.

"We are the English advance-guard," he replied. "Answer my question, please."

It was not so much the man's accent as his manner that strengthened Jack's suspicion. There was a stiff haughtiness about it that he knew for the hallmark of the one nationality in Europe that has the impress of the drillmaster set indelibly upon all its sons.

"We did not know the English were coming so soon," Jack said, to gain a little time—as a matter of fact, the English had not yet declared war. "Just a minute, sir, and I will call an officer to direct you."

And, pulling Raoul by the sleeve, Jack slipped through the entrance to the courtyard, where a number of cyclist troops and motor-cycle couriers were lounging. The sentry, who had overheard the entire conversation, yawned again and paid no attention to the little knot of strange cavalrymen who looked so nervous and acted so ill at ease.

"Make haste," was the last command the lancer officer shot after Jack and Raoul. Then he turned in his saddle and muttered something to the men behind him, but still the sentry did not suspect. He merely stood a little straighter be-

cause there was an officer present, little witting the chance that lay within his grasp.

Safe in the shadows of the courtyard, Jack turned quickly to Raoul.

"Did you see?" he demanded.

"What?" said Raoul slowly. "They said they were English, didn't they?"

"Yes, but are they? Did you notice how that officer spoke to me—as if I was an inferior kind of animal? Did you notice their helmets? Did they look English?"

"They looked funny," conceded Raoul.

"You bet they did," Jack asserted. "They're the funniest-looking and funniest-riding Englishmen I ever saw. Englishmen! They're nothing of the kind! Did you ever see Uhlans, Raoul?"

"Yes, once when I went up to Berlin with father."

"And you don't know those fellows!" Jack's voice rose with triumphant scorn. "Why, I never saw a Uhlan in my life, but I could almost smell those fellows! They're Uhlans, Raoul; Uhlans in Liège!"

"But they couldn't be." Raoul did not sound as convincing as his words.

"It's hard to understand how they got here, but they're not Belgians, and they're certainly

not English," replied Jack. "So they must be Germans. Now, the question is what to do."

"Captain Montjuit," suggested Raoul.

"That's it," said Jack.

They ran across the courtyard. Captain Montjuit was not in the little room he had shared with them, but a soldier told them the captain had returned and was upstairs in the offices occupied by General Leman's staff. He heard their story with close attention, and before Jack had spoken half a dozen sentences was leading them down into the courtyard on the run.

"It seems almost incredible," he said. "But we can take no chances. At the same time, I would not for the world fire into our own men."

He hastily called up the few troops in the courtyard, and started toward the street. The boys followed him, but he motioned them back.

"If these fellows are Germans they will shoot," he said. "Stay back. You boys have done enough."

Raoul would have protested, but Jack drew him aside. There was a stack of rifles in a corner of the courtyard and Jack took two of them, together with several packets of ammunition from an open box.

"Now, we can do more than just listen," he murmured. "Come along."

They fell in at the rear of the file of men who were following Captain Montjuit, but soon dodged past them and emerged into the shadows of the gateway in time to see the Belgian officer address the mysterious horsemen.

"Did you wish to see General Leman?" asked Captain Montjuit politely.

"Yes," replied the lancer officer impatiently. "It is important."

He gathered up his reins and started to ride toward the courtyard entrance. But Captain Montjuit stepped out into the roadway and barred his path.

"One moment," he ordered. "What is your regiment?"

"We are English," snapped the strange horseman. "Now, sir, will you let us pass?"

"You are no more English than I am," cried Montjuit. "You are Germans. Surrender!"

And as he spoke he dragged his automatic from its holster and covered the man. But the invaders were not daunted by discovery.

"Hourra, Deutschland!" shouted their officer, spurring his horse against Captain Montjuit,

while behind him his men couched their spears and followed at a gallop.

Captain Montjuit did not flinch. He pulled the trigger of his pistol, expecting to see the German officer tumble from his seat. But in the flurry of the afternoon he had neglected to reload his weapon after emptying its magazine, and the click of the hammer was the sole response to his pressure on the trigger. The German's big charger crashed down on him in the same moment that he hurled the useless weapon in the faces of his foes.

It was to Jack and Raoul that he owed his life. The Belgian soldiers concealed in the shadows of the archway were bewildered by the rapid sequence of events they could not understand, and they did not realize that they had been given their cue to shoot.

"Quick, Raoul!" muttered Jack, as he saw that Captain Montjuit was helpless. "You fire into the men behind. I'll take the officer."

They emptied their magazines as fast as they could pull the triggers. Jack aimed his first shot at the Uhlan officer and had the satisfaction of bringing him down, although the range was so short it was not a shot to boast of. Then he joined his fire to that of Raoul, who was punishing the

mass of Germans charging behind their commander. In their close-packed ranks, jammed up in the narrow street, every shot had effect upon man or beast. The Germans were checked, despite themselves, and just as they were about to rally and come on again, the Belgian cyclist troops grasped the situation and took a hand.

Under the storm of lead from unseen guns, the Germans started to retreat as rapidly as they could extricate themselves from the heaps of dead and dying men and horses that cumbered roadway and sidewalk. Jack looked around for Captain Montjuit, but his superior was nowhere to be seen. Obviously this was the moment in which to make the victory complete, yet there was nobody at hand to seize the opportunity. Jack slapped another clip of cartridges into his magazine, and nudged Raoul.

"Yell like thunder!" he murmured. Then, at the top of his voice, he shouted: "Charge! For Belgium!"

The Belgians responded readily to their rallying cry, and leaped out after the retreating cavalry, who were speedily cut to pieces in the labyrinth of an unknown city. The fusillade at this comparatively early hour of the afternoon had attracted much attention and detachments of sol-

diers and gendarmerie hurried up from every direction, gradually closing in on the few Germans left and forcing them to surrender.

So great was the confusion that all sorts of rumors were immediately set afoot. Even as they forced a passage back through the crowds collecting around the Town Hall, the boys heard wild tales of how the Germans had already passed the fortifications and were launching an attack upon the city barricades. Others said a Zeppelin had dropped a bomb. Gendarmes had stretched a cordon about Headquarters and the heaps of injured and dead lancers and horses in the zone of the Belgians' fire; but the boys got by these men by pretending to carry messages to the general.

Inside the lines they found the confusion as pronounced as in the rest of the city. Men were running about, shouting and countermanding orders. General Leman stood at the head of the main flight of steps to the Town Hall, orderlies on each side of him carrying huge gasolene torches. He was the only cool head present, and it was to him that the boys addressed themselves.

"Excuse me, sir," said Jack, as he saluted, "but I think you'll find Captain Montjuit under that dead German officer and his horse in the gateway."

"Do you know anything about this?" demanded the commander. "Ah, then, I thank Heaven that there is at least one who can explain matters to me."

He wanted to know what had happened, and with Raoul's assistance Jack gave him a brief sketch of the incident. The general accompanied them into the gateway and had his orderlies drag the bodies of the German officer and his charger aside, and underneath them, as Jack had said, they found Captain Montjuit, stunned by the shock he had received, but otherwise unhurt.

"It was little short of a miracle that you were not caught or killed, sir," said the captain, after he had been restored to consciousness. "These Uhlans had managed to pass all our outposts and sentries unsuspected, and were actually at your door when they were discovered by these young gentlemen."

"But what I cannot understand," remarked General Leman quizzically, "is how you boys happen to be here. It was only a couple of hours or so ago I received a telephone message from the father of one of you notifying me that he was withdrawing your protection."

Raoul explained how they had been left behind at the station.

"So," said the general. "Well, that was a stroke of luck for me. As it is, young sirs, I shall avail myself of your services as much as I may, but I shall reward your presence of mind by making sure that you leave Liège before the Germans come in—whenever that unfortunate day may be. In the meantime, you are members of my staff."

CHAPTER IV

A MESSAGE FOR THE KING

All that night the guns boomed around Liège. In the glare of searchlights the Germans hurled masses of troops at the belt of eastern forts, evidently hoping that the suddenness of their onslaught might win them a success otherwise impossible. But thanks to the scouting work done by Captain Montjuit's force that morning the Belgians were prepared. General Leman dispatched Jack and Raoul to the infantry barracks in town to order the colonels of the 9th and 14th Regiments of the Line to take their commands to the gaps between Forts Fléron, Chaudfontaine, Embourg, and Boncelles, through which the enemy were endeavoring to drive wedges of men in order to be able to attack the forts from the rear.

Barbed wire entanglements and trenches had been prepared by the engineers, and it was the work of the boys to conduct the Belgian regiments to the stations assigned to them. Jack guided the 14th to its post between Forts Fléron

and Chaudfontaine, and as the companies finally took their ground under the fire of the advancing Germans he was surprised to hear the voice of Monsieur Jemard.

"Why, Jack," said his tutor, who looked very martial in uniform and shiny sword, "what are you doing here? I thought you would be in Brussels with Raoul and Monsieur Heilleprin."

"Raoul and I stayed to see the fun," returned Jack, edging away—he was very much afraid Monsieur Jemard—or, perhaps, one should say now Lieutenant Jemard—might be disposed to exert his old-time authority and order him under cover.

"Tut, tut," said the tutor, noting Jack's disposition for flight. "You know I'm not a spoilsport. I might have known, too, that you and Raoul would stay if you got a chance. Au revoir, Jack, and let's keep track of each other. It's well to have friends in such times."

"Thank you, sir," replied Jack. "I will—and I'll tell Raoul, too."

But as a matter of fact, he forgot all about it in the rush of duties that eventful night. Every Belgian soldier and officer was needed in the firing line, and General Leman did not spare his "young aides," as he called them. For the first time in

their lives, Jack and Raoul knew what it was to go all night long without a snatch of sleep; and, strange to say, in the excitement of the experience they were wholly untroubled by fatigue.

They received a liberal education in war-craft in those few hours. They saw the Chateau of Langres, opposite Fort Embourg, blown up by a Belgian mine just as it was filled with exultant Germans. They saw companies and battalions of onrushing Germans blown to atoms in front of Fort Fléron by sunken mines which were touched off by Belgian engineers by the simple pressure of a button. They saw the awful, sweeping devastation of machine-guns. And along toward morning they witnessed the charge of the Belgian infantry from the Heights of Wandre, which swept the German 9th Corps off the field, and netted the Belgians 800 prisoners.

Standing in the suburbs just back of Fort Chaudfontaine in the pale light of early morning, they watched the prisoners being marched in by the victors.

"Gosh," said Jack to Raoul, "those fellows look just like ordinary men, don't they? They're the same as we are—except that they're dressed in gray and I guess they're dirtier."

During the morning there was a lull in the fir-

ing, and all who could—including the boys—had a rest. But within a few hours General Leman had more work for them to do, in caring for the refugees who continued to pour into town from the northern villages. These poor people had to be warned of the danger of staying in Liège and advised of the safe routes to follow in escaping from the part of the country occupied by the Germans. It was very pathetic to see how heart-broken they were to abandon their homes, but most of them took their bad fortune bravely.

"Let me help you with your bundles," said Jack to an old woman who, with her two daughters, was overloaded with household belongings, among them a feather bed.

"Eh?" said the woman, who had never heard of the Gray Wolf Corps. "And how much will you want for your trouble, young fellow?"

"Nothing at all," answered Jack with a grin. "We of the Gray Wolf Corps are bound to help every one in trouble, you know, and we are not allowed to receive pay for it."

"Dear, dear," she said. "Is that so? Well, it's a fine thing for lads, and I do wish those cruel Germans had the same spirit—driving a body out of house and home."

"It is pretty bad, isn't it, ma'am?" agreed

Jack, helping himself to her biggest parcel. "I'm awfully sorry for you."

"Ah, well, it might be worse," she said philosophically. "Last night while the battle was going on a shell came right in our kitchen and burst."

"Did it hurt any of you?" asked Jack.

"The poor cat," said the woman, with a break in her voice. "I was like to weep, lad. But after all, it was better than if I or Susanne or Cecilie there had been killed."

With night came a resumption of the bombardment and the attacks on the gaps between the forts. During the day the Germans had brought up more artillery and fresh troops, and they pushed their advance with a savagery that seemed intensified by the unexpected stiffness of the Belgians' resistance. The little garrison held to their trenches under a storm of shrapnel. It finally became so bad that Captain Montjuit forbade either Jack or Raoul to venture out of the city. Such orders as were dispatched to the trenches were sent over underground telephone wires.

The main German attack was along the valley of the Ourthe, through a heavily wooded country, directed at a point between Forts Embourg and Boncelles. Again and again the Germans hurled

themselves against this line, while they restrained the Belgians from reinforcing the troops who held it by means of constant feints at other gaps. Time after time they were thrown back, and the search-lights that flickered back and forth across the open spaces revealed their dead and wounded lying in heaps. And yet so desperate was their advance that they used the bodies of their own comrades as shields to help them hold their ground and push ahead for any distance, no matter how short.

When morning came the Belgians were exhausted and they looked forward to the prospect of a rest such as they had enjoyed the day before. But no such rest was allowed them. The Germans brought up still more troops and more artillery, and pressed their assault as remorselessly as ever. Toward noon their guns silenced Fort Fléron by smashing the disappearing carriages of the bigger cannon, and this weakened the cross-fire the Belgians had hitherto been able to direct upon the flank of all German columns sweeping up to attack Chaudfontaine and Embourg.

Half an hour later Captain Montjuit came out of General Leman's office at the Town Hall and motioned to Jack and Raoul, who had been kicking their heels in the ante-chamber, that the gen-

eral wished to see them. They sprang up at once, both hoping for a chance to get out and see something of the terrific conflict, which made even the most solid buildings shake and quiver on their foundations.

"I am about to remove my headquarters to Fort Loncin," said the general. "I wish you to follow me. Can either of you drive a motor-car?"

Both boys assented.

"Good. Then Captain Montjuit will pick out for you the fastest car we have attached to Headquarters. See to it, please, Captain. That is all."

Jack was dying to ask Captain Montjuit what it all meant, but he received no encouragement, and he and Raoul had learned already that the first duty of a soldier is to keep his mouth shut. Downstairs in the courtyard the captain spoke to them for the first time.

"This is the best car we have," he said, laying his hand on the hood of a big Mercedes touring-car. "Do you understand the mechanism?"

"I do, sir," volunteered Raoul. "Father had a Mercedes."

Captain Montjuit put him through a brief verbal examination as to controls, brakes, and engine.

"All right," he said finally. "You pass.

You'll make all the better soldiers, boys, for this knowledge of yours. Nowadays a soldier must be a chauffeur, an engineer, an explosive expert, a railroad man, and a few other things besides."

Then the captain called up a soldier and oversaw the filling of the tank.

"And you'd better take a couple of these, too," he added, taking two rifles from a stack in the corner. "Here are cartridges. You might need them."

Jack gave Raoul a dig in the ribs on the sly. It was evident he meant to imply that something unusual was in the wind. But before they had a chance to think of asking the question uppermost in their minds, General Leman and his staff came out of the Town Hall and began climbing into cars all about them.

"Have you got everything you want?" demanded Captain Montjuit. "Yes? Well, follow Headquarters to Loncin. You'll get final orders there."

The run out to Fort Loncin on the western face of the city—the side farthest removed from the German attack—was eventless, save for the evidences of terror among such of the population as had not yet fled. From the higher ground above the valley of the Meuse, looking backward, the

boys could look across the city toward the low eastern hills crowned by the line of flaming forts that strove dauntlessly to beat back the German onslaughts. The sky-line as far as they could see was starred with bursting shells, and the thunder of the cannonade was monotonously persistent.

The cars were parked at the foot of the hill under the fortress, and the boys walked up with the general and his staff. Not many minutes after their arrival the firing, which had been furious all night and morning, redoubled in volume; and presently the reason became apparent. From the ramparts of Fort Loncin, with binoculars, it was possible to see the Belgian troops who had been holding the gap between Embourg and Boncelles streaming back into the city with the Germans at their heels. The ring of forts had been pierced.

Once in possession of this gap, despite the cross-fire from the forts on either side, the Germans brought up artillery into the city, and commenced to shell Fort Fléron from the rear. With its heavier guns previously disabled, Fléron could make but feeble reply, and the Germans began to develop an infantry assault against it from all sides. The garrison still had their machine-guns,

however, and they used these with telling effect, throwing the Germans back at first and finally succumbing more through inability to exist under the hail of shrapnel poured on them from the German field-batteries than from the infantry attacks. As it was, the twenty-foot-deep moat was crossed by the Germans over the packed bodies of their own men, and there was desperate hand-to-hand fighting in the casemates before the Belgian flag was run down.

Dusk fell on this final scene in the first act of the tragedy of Liège. The officers who had watched the attack from the ramparts of Loncin folded their binoculars sadly and turned away. They knew the end was in sight. The other forts might hold out for days, but with a break in the circle of fortifications the enemy would certainly seize the city, would be able to assault all the forts from the rear, and would soon have a clear road into Belgium. Some men swore, others wept, and many prayed as they paced back and forth. Jack and Raoul felt lumps in their throats.

"I couldn't feel any worse if a German dreadnought came along and knocked Sandy Hook into a cocked hat," Jack confided to Raoul.

The Belgian boy had tears in his eyes. This was his home city. He had been born here. It

meant everything to him. His grief was too deep for words. Jack saw this, and tried to comfort him.

"Cheer up, old fellow," he urged. "We're going to beat them, yet. You know we are. What's a little thing like this, after all? They've *got* to win some at first. They had the drop on us, didn't they? But we'll win in the long run—we can't help winning."

Raoul gripped his hand.

"Yes, Jack," he muttered between clenched teeth. "We've got to win. We shall win."

The bugles were just blowing for supper when Captain Montjuit came to them.

"The general wants you again," he said. "Come with me."

And again they followed him, only this time they wound down dismal flights of stairs through the solid concrete foundations of the fortress, emerging finally in a casemate far underground, lighted by electricity and ventilated by shafts that ran perpendicularly to the surface of the moat. Here at a desk, as busy as when he occupied the private office of the Burgomaster in the Town Hall, sat General Leman. His face was sad, like the faces of all the Belgian officers now; but his

mouth was grimly set, and anybody could feel the determination that radiated from him.

"I told you boys I should send you out of Liège before the Germans came in," he said. "Well, so I shall—and I shall avail myself of the opportunity created by my promise to entrust you with a most important mission." He smiled slightly as he saw the look of gloom on both their faces change to one of expectation. "I have here a dispatch I wish you to hand either to King Albert himself, or if you cannot reach him, to his Adjutant General. You may repeat to his Majesty what I have written here—that I shall hold every fort around Liège until the last one is crumbled to dust. You are to take the motor-car Captain Montjuit assigned you and proceed as rapidly as possible to Brussels. I leave the choice of routes to you, recommending only caution and a sharp watch for Uhlan patrols, who, by this time, have probably gotten across the road."

He handed the dispatch to Raoul.

"You understand your instructions?"

"Yes, sir."

They both saluted.

"Then good-by, lads, and God bless you. You have both done your duty. I have asked the King to employ you further, if your parents permit."

He nodded, and they understood the interview was over. As they climbed the stairs to the surface with Captain Montjuit, Jack said:

"Did you know I wasn't a Belgian, sir?"

"No," answered the captain in surprise.

"Well, it's true. I'm an American. But if I could be a man like the general I'd rather be a Belgian."

Captain Montjuit nodded.

"I'll tell you what, lads," he said, "I'd almost be willing to be a German to be a man like the general."

"That's how I feel," echoed Raoul softly.

And there was not a man in the small garrison of Liège who did not share this feeling to the full.

Captain Montjuit accompanied the boys to their automobile.

"Here's a map," he said as he bade them good-by. "Use it if you feel like it, but traveling at night, under the conditions you'll have to face, your instinct will be the best guide. Don't look for trouble—and I hope you get through."

"Yes, sir," they responded. "Good-by."

Raoul threw in the clutch, and the big car glided silently forward into the night, while overhead the searchlights of Loncin began to weave back and forth across the city at their feet, spy-

ing for the detachments of Germans who were prowling through its streets, searching for stray Belgian soldiers who had not been able to escape to one or another of the forts. From the city rose a chorus of many sounds, the reports of rifles, stray explosions, the roar of flames in stray spots where shells had ignited houses, shrieks and screams. From the eastern hills echoed the remorseless thunder of the forts that still held out, each striving to outdo the other, as if in endeavor to avenge the fall of Fléron.

At the bottom of the hill on which the fortress stood, Raoul turned sharp to the right, and, picking his way through a network of dark alleyways in a poor quarter, he crossed the line of the railroad which runs to Tirlemont, and finally took a road out of the city which passes to the right of Fort Hollogne through the suburban section where the Heilleprin villa was situated. At this hour the Germans had occupied only that portion of the city lying on the east bank of the Meuse, and while there was some danger from marauding parties of Uhlans, the boys had little difficulty in dodging the foe. The streets were deserted; the lights were all out. But Raoul drove as much by instinct as by sight. He knew every foot of this country.

The outposts below Hollogne stopped them, and the sergeant who examined their passes shook his head when he heard their destination.

"You'll never make it," he said. "The Uhlans are thick as peas from here to the River Geer. Why, even the infantry, when they retired a few hours back, had to fight their way out to get on the Brussels Road. We could hear their guns."

He went on to explain that the mixed brigade, the 9th and 14th line regiments, who had been holding the Embourg-Boncelles gap, together with the Garde Civique, or National Guard troops, had been ordered to leave the city when it became apparent that the Germans had broken the fortress ring. Only the artillery garrisons were being held. The Third Division had left earlier in the day, part of it by train; the mixed brigade and the Garde Civique were under orders to retire to Tirlemont or the nearest point where they could find supports.

The boys thanked him for this information and went on. It was not a very dark night, and as the country opened up, the road became measurably distinct in front of them. The weather was pleasant and warm, and both Jack and Raoul found it difficult to believe that they were not out for pleasure alone. The bombardment of Liège sounded

like the dull muttering of summer thunder. War was a thousand miles away from them. There was every temptation to abandon caution. Indeed, caution seemed singularly out of place in such peaceful surroundings, and they began to laugh at the sergeant's warnings.

CHAPTER V

THE ROAD TO BRUSSELS

At the first village they came to, Raoul slowed automatically, but the houses that straggled along either side of the road were dark and empty. No lights shone in them; doors hung open; the starlight poured through raised windows upon rooms left in disorder. It was evident the inhabitants had left hurriedly, and proof that the Germans had not been here was furnished by the mooing of a cow in a meadow. A mile farther on, however, the boys came to a cross-roads inn, slightly back from the road, which was brightly illuminated.

"Well, here are some people who aren't afraid of the Germans," remarked Raoul. "Shall we ask for news?"

"Go ahead," said Jack.

Raoul turned into a curved drive that led up to the inn, and blew his horn. There was a frantic babble of voices and an overturning of chairs inside.

"Who's there?" called a hoarse voice, and a big figure blocked the doorway.

Jack felt a cold shiver shoot down his back.

"They're Germans," he gasped in Raoul's ear. "Go on! For Pat's sake, Raoul, go on!"

"Who's there?" called the man in the doorway again.

Others crowded up behind him, and the boys heard men running around from the rear of the building where the stables lay. Raoul, to his consternation, found his speed-lever had jammed momentarily. The man in the doorway, who was an officer, turned and barked a command to the men inside, and started down the shallow flight of steps to the drive. One hand rested on a pistol holster, but his face did not show suspicion.

"Why don't you answer?" he asked in passable French. "We won't hurt you. Who are you?"

Jack stumbled through his brain for a German phrase that would throw the man off his guard, gain time for them, do anything to save the situation. But all he could think of was two words, and at last, in desperation, he bellowed:

"*Auf weidersehen!*" And as a clinching proof of his versatility, he added: "*Mein herr!*"

The German looked puzzled. His men, who thronged respectfully behind him, showed equal

bewilderment. Plainly, they thought themselves confronting lunatics, whether harmless or otherwise.

The officer placed one hand on the tonneau door, and asked Jack a question in German. Suddenly, in that very moment, Raoul found his gears would respond, and the click of the released lever reached Jack's ears.

"Now, Raoul!" he yelled. "Go!"

And he gave the inquisitive officer a stinging uppercut that bowled him over backward into the arms of his men, while Mercedes sped off into the night, rounded a corner of the drive on two wheels, made an *S* turn into the roadway, righted herself, and slid on at fifty miles an hour, Raoul feeding the gas to her as fast as she would take it.

For maybe thirty seconds the Germans did not know what to make of it. They had seen that the occupants of the car were very young, and the boldness of its approach had disarmed them. But even before the officer came to from the effects of Jack's punch, there was a rush for pursuit. Looking back, Jack saw a stream of dark figures shoot out of the driveway from the inn and bite into the dust-cloud left by the flying car.

"Cricky, Raoul!" he called to his chum, who was bending over the steering-wheel, eyes fixed on

the unlighted road ahead. "They're motor-cyclists, not Uhlans."

"They'll never catch us while this car runs," responded Raoul briefly. "Keep an eye on them, Jack. If they do creep up, give 'em a shot or two."

Jack picked up one of the rifles Captain Montjuit had given them, and surveyed the pursuers, who were beginning to string out, evidently so that they would not make such a good mark for him. Some of the Germans did not attempt to join in the chase. They dropped to their knees beside the road, and sent shot after shot after the automobile. Once Jack ducked, but the other bullets went wild.

"All the same, it's about time to discourage this," he told himself, as he saw that the motor-cyclists gave no sign of abandoning the pursuit.

He took his rifle, leaned it on the back of the tonneau, and opened fire, shooting very slowly and watching for opportunities when the car was running smoothly, so that his aim would not be diverted. His fifth shot pitched over one of the Germans, and by a stroke of good luck, two of the men behind piled themselves up in the road on top of the wounded man's machine. Jack chuckled.

" 'Raising his rusty rifle, the brave boy fired

HE GAVE THE INQUISITIVE OFFICER A STINGING UPPERCUT

thrice and twelve more Redskins bit the dust!' " he quoted. "I've got 'em going, Raoul."

But while the Germans dropped farther behind after this lesson and were careful to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible, they did not relinquish the trail, and Jack began to worry.

"Where are we now? Do you know?" he asked Raoul.

The Belgian boy took a short look at the country around them, fairly distinct in the clear starlight.

"Somewhere near Celes," he said.

"Well, I don't like the way these fellows behind are hanging on," answered Jack. "Do you think they could be trying to pocket us—run us into some other detachment of their friends, so we'd be sealed up before and behind?"

"Maybe," admitted Raoul. "I don't see what we can do, though."

"Can't we strike off to one side—turn east toward the Meuse again?"

"We might find a road through the Ardennes," agreed Raoul. "We can't turn off into every cart track, though. It's no use risking tire trouble. Let's hang on a little longer and see what happens."

They sped on through the quiet night. Every

now and then a farmhouse, a tiny village, or a chateau loomed up before them, invariably dark. Twice they heard the Germans behind them blowing bugle-calls, as if signaling to some one in the vicinity.

The second time the bugle sounded from the rear the automobile was entering one of those long, straggling Belgian villages that consist of two lines of houses, one on either side of the road. Suddenly a third bugle sounded, this time ahead.

"Full speed, Raoul," called Jack. "Straight into 'em—whoever they are!"

Raoul nodded, and went from second into high, the powerful car gathering itself together just as a cat does when it prepares to spring. In the tonneau Jack crouched ready, one loaded rifle in his hands, another at his feet.

They came around the corner full tilt, and there before them the roadway was blocked by a squadron of Uhlans, big, gray men on big, gray horses, their lance-shafts making them look still bigger than they were. They had been trotting toward the car, but as it loomed into view, the front-rank men involuntarily pulled their horses to a halt, and when Raoul horned vigorously, the horses reared up on their hind legs in fright at this strange apparition of the night. Jack did not lose

a second in seizing advantage of this opportunity. He opened fire straight ahead over the car's bonnet, aiming for horses, rather than men, and clearing a narrow avenue through the center of the squadron. When he had emptied one rifle he seized the other.

Horses went down right and left, wounded animals sprawling into ranks of uninjured animals. Most of the squadron found it impossible to control their mounts, and Raoul drove his car into the disordered files like a monster thunder bolt. Smack! A horse that sidled into the car's path was caught on the hood and hurled screaming against a house wall. Men and horses, a dozen or so, were side-swiped by the fenders and pitched into the gutters. The automobile careened dangerously, and skidded onto the narrow sidewalk, but Raoul managed somehow to maintain control and kept her going.

As they shot through the squadron they were the targets of lances, pistols and carbines, but neither of the boys was hit, although a lance struck through the rain-shield, splintering it and covering Raoul with broken glass, and the cushions of the tonneau seat were torn to pieces by bullets. The worst damage did not become apparent until they had passed through the danger

zone and were several hundred feet beyond the demoralized Uhlans. There was an abrupt cessation of the smooth headlong speed that Raoul had coaxed out of the car, and the way seemed to have become abnormally bumpy.

"They've got us, I guess," remarked Raoul, glancing over his shoulder to see the German officers trying to regain control of their men.

"Puncture?" questioned Jack.

"Two. We'll never——"

"Phut! Phut!"

The Germans had opened a heavy fire, and by good luck and good shooting two bullets went home at the first volley—one in the fuel tank, and one in the carburetor. There was a grinding of disjointed, loose-ended machinery, and the car jolted to a grating stop.

"All over," said Raoul unhappily.

Jack glanced quickly around.

"Not by a jugful!" he exclaimed. "We'll have to make more of a fight than this, Raoul. Think of the general's dispatch. We've got to defend that to the last. Come on."

He thrust one of the rifles into Raoul's hands, picked up the second, together with the ammunition, and jumped down to the street. The Germans had seen the plight of the automobile and

were coming up at a gallop, with lances in rest, cheering like fox-hunters after the quarry.

"Where to?" panted Raoul, as he followed his comrade.

"Into this house, first," ordered Jack, darting into the open doorway of the first house they came to. "Shut the door. That's right. Now, let's pile this hat-rack against it. That's enough. Come on."

He dashed out through the kitchen into the little garden that stretched down to the bank of a rivulet which washed the back doors of the village.

"But where are we going?" asked Raoul, following blindly on. "Isn't that as good a place as——"

"No," returned Jack, diving under a hedge that separated the yard of the house they had entered from the property adjoining. "They'd get us in no time, there. But they'll think we're fools enough to try to make a stand in such a trap, and they'll waste several minutes before they find out the trick we're playing on 'em. No, sir, Raoul. We're bound for the church up the street. It's stone and built to last—and I guess we'll last there longer than anywhere else."

"How do you think of all that?" said Raoul, as they twisted through a second hedge. Behind

them the Germans were kicking at the door of the house they had entered and threatening to burn it.

"Don't know," puffed Jack. "It just came to me. But hurry up, old scout. We're a long way from the church yet."

The spire of the village church was etched against the purple night sky about halfway up the street, where it widened to form the Grande Place, embellished by a miniature Hotel de Ville, or Town Hall, a hotel, several stores, and the church itself. When they had reached a house which they calculated to be diagonally opposite the church, the boys broke a window, climbed through and then unlocked the street door. As Jack poked his head out, he heard a yell of disappointment from the Uhlans, who had just discovered the trick played upon them.

But as the boys broke from their cover and ran across the street toward the church, the yell changed to a shout of excitement. The bugles blew again, and the Germans raced after their prey as hard as horses could gallop.

"Not the front door; that will be fastened," warned Raoul, as they neared their goal. "Try the side. There must be an entrance we can force somewhere."

The church was a heavily built medieval edifice,

erected in the days when men put all their souls and energies into their houses of worship. Its Gothic tower was solid, for all the airy tracery and delicate carving that adorned it. The buttresses, that supported the stone walls, were each deep enough to conceal a man. The boys skirted the walls without finding any sign of a door at first, but after they had made a complete circuit of the east end, and when the Uhlans were actually in the street in front of the building, they came upon a low door which led to the vestry and stood ajar. Through it the frightened parish priest had fled a few short hours before, bearing with him probably the robes and vessels that were his pride.

Like everything else about the church, this door was strongly built of age-stained timber, riveted and plated with scrolled iron. On the inside was a massive bolt, which the Scouts snapped in place.

"What now?" said Raoul, as they collapsed into a pew, panting for breath.

"It looks like the tower to me," was Jack's suggestion. "What do you think?"

"Yes," agreed the Belgian lad. "We could never guard this whole church. They'll be coming in through the windows as well as the doors, I expect."

In fact, the Uhlans were already beating against the great entrance doors under the tower, shouting terrible threats of what they would do to their enemies when they caught them, while the footsteps of others could be heard encircling the building in search of the point where the boys had entered. In addition to this, the puffing of motorcycles was audible in the street outside, which heralded the arrival of the Germans with whom Jack and Raoul had had their first adventure of the evening; and these new-comers might be relied upon to bend all their efforts to revenge the coup of which they and their commander had been victims.

"No time to lose," said Jack, as several bullets crashed into the wood of the door around the lock. "Is it bolted? Yes? Well, let 'em smash the lock, then. Much good it will do 'em. Now, let's try and find the ladder up the tower."

The entrance to the tower was a little room off the baptistry, to one side of the entrance. In the darkness which enshrouded the whole building it was exceedingly difficult for the boys to make their way around. But they finally discovered a shaky ladder up which they climbed to a landing some thirty feet from the floor. Then, by great exertions, they contrived to haul the ladder

up after them. Not satisfied with this, however, they climbed two other ladders, the last of which brought them out onto a platform which ran around the base of the spire and was parapeted to a height of more than three feet. From this vantage-point they had a first-rate view of the street below, and the dispositions of the enemy.

Some of the Uhlans had leaped their horses over the low wall around the churchyard and were cantering about among the grave-stones, looking up at the building and shaking their lances at it. The motor-cycle scouts were grouped across the street before the Hotel de Ville, in the windows of which a number of sharp-shooters had established themselves. While the boys looked, an officer ordered the Uhlans out of the church-yard, and all the men were told to dismount and their horses led off down the street.

"They mean business," commented Jack. "If we only had a few bombs!"

"But we haven't," rejoined Raoul practically. "What do you say to a few shots, instead?"

"Let her go," said the American boy. "Let's pick that group by the Town Hall."

Both the boys were fair shots, but it is not as easy to shoot down from a height as on the level, especially when you are not used to it. Conse-

quently their first attack netted them but two Germans as a return for the expenditure of ten cartridges.

"That's poor work," Raoul grumbled. "We'll have to do better, Jack."

Jack nodded.

"What are they up to, now?" He leaned over the parapet, only to draw back quickly as a bullet pinged smartly against the stone-work a couple of feet below. "That's a warning to be careful. But I saw enough. A bunch of them have got planks, and they're building a sort of inclined platform up to the windows in the chancel, where we can't get at 'em."

"I don't see that it matters much," remarked Raoul. "They're bound to get inside, and the worst they can do is to try to climb up the tower. I hope they do. That will give us a real chance at them."

"Men as clever as they are wouldn't try to climb a thirty-foot perpendicular gap," returned Jack. "No, sir. They'll play a deeper game than that. They couldn't undermine the tower, could they?"

Raoul kicked at the stone coping of the parapet.

"Look at that," he exclaimed. "Stone and cement a couple of feet thick all the way down. Do

you think a handful of cavalry and motor-scouts could harm such work? They'd need dynamite."

"All very well, then," declared Jack. "They'll try to smoke us out. You see if they don't."

His prediction was justified. From the Hotel de Ville and several other buildings on the square the Germans maintained a desultory fire upon the church tower, which effectually prevented any sniping by its defenders—until Raoul discovered a couple of narrow windows part way down its profile whence they might fire unobserved. But presently even these loop-holes were discerned by the German sharp-shooters, and nickel-tipped bullets flicked the stone around them too frequently to be comfortable. Jack and Raoul finally sat down in the middle of the floor of this landing, and dozed. They were both extremely tired, and sleepiness overtook them.

How long they slept neither knew. It could not have been more than an hour or so, for both had been conscious all the while of the intermittent bombardment which was kept up by the besiegers. What awoke both at the same moment was an intense desire to cough that nearly amounted to strangulation. Jack bounded to his feet and pointed to a wisp of blue smoke curling up from

the well down which led the ladder to the landing below.

"There you are!" he cried triumphantly. "It's just as I said!"

"Well, you needn't be so glad about it," grumbled Raoul. "I don't see that it's anything to be joyful about."

The smoke came up in swirling clouds of increasing density. Already the tower-room was hazy with it. As a precautionary measure, the boys clamped down as tight as they could a ramshackle trap-door, which was supposed to cover the ladder-well. Then they searched about for any sort of refuse to seal the crevices. With an old piece of board they scraped the floor for dust and this they carefully brushed into the interstices of the trap-door, packing it firmly so that it would not sift through. Several odds and ends of lumber were likewise utilized, and lastly they took their coats and muffled the trap-door with them.

There were still cracks, not only in the trap-door, but in the boards of the floor, through which the smoke rose; but the volume of it was considerably diminished. The boys took long drinks from their canteens, and ascended to the open parapet to get some pure air and find out what the

enemy was doing. For the time being the sniping had ceased, and upon reconnoitering the position in the Grand Place beneath them, Jack and Raoul discovered a party of Uhlans making merry with an array of bottles they had unearthed in one of the hotels. The Germans were in plain view, and this time the boys gauged the range better. The streaks of lead they squirted into the revelers below tore through two and three men at a time, ricocheted from café tables and sidewalks, and often wounded a second time the man they had hit first. The Uhlans broke for cover, howling.

But of course the inevitable answer was a storm of bullets which covered the platform with stone-splinters, and again drove the boys to the protection of the smoky room at the head of the ladder.

"Much good that did us," said Jack gloomily —the strain was beginning to tell. "We might better have let them alone."

Whatever it was the Germans had put on the fire, the smoke now became charged with fumes that were slightly nauseating. The boys sought the windows and kept their heads as near the openings as they dared. They felt that pure air was a necessity, no matter what perils they risked to get it. But the Germans were cunning, and while some of their riflemen raked the parapet

above, others were charged with covering the windows at the top of the tower.

"I'm going to try the platform again," gasped Raoul. "Can't stand this—rather stop a bullet than die like a rat, anyhow."

"Coming, too," assented Jack briefly.

They crawled onto the platform and lay flat, hugging the stone floor as tight as they could and instinctively trying to dodge all the interstices in the carved work through which stray bullets were likely to pop.

"Destroy that letter before anything happens, Raoul," suggested Jack.

But before Raoul could draw the letter from his shirt, the firing beneath them was tripled and quadrupled in violence. A sound of cheering floated up to the two boys high on the smoking tower. Jack leaped to his feet and leaned far out over the parapet.

"Hurrah, Raoul!" he shouted. "It looks like the whole Belgian army, and they've got the Germans on the run."

The square before the church was the scene of a pitched, hand-to-hand battle. A column of Belgian infantry had debouched into it from the west and were forcing out the detachments of Uhlans and motor-cycle scouts. Some of the Germans

were trapped in buildings, whence they had been shooting at Jack and Raoul, and these sold their lives dearly. But the Belgians broke in upon them, regardless of their resistance, and hurled them from the windows. The action was over inside of five minutes. Such of the Germans as could get to their mounts or machines were scooting away to the eastward, and the Belgians were free to gather up their booty, after throwing out patrols to guard against a counter-attack.

"The whole Belgian army!" repeated Raoul skeptically. "What are you talking about? There are only three or four hundred of them."

"I don't care. They fought like the whole army," retorted Jack. "Yell to 'em to let us out."

Raoul shouted down to the men in the square and several looked up. One ran to get an officer, and even at that distance, in the semi-darkness, Jack thought the officer looked familiar.

"Who are you?" he hailed them.

"Belgian dispatch-bearers," answered Raoul. "Please have your men put out the fire at the foot of the tower."

The officer sent a sergeant into the basement of the Hotel de Ville, and the sergeant soon appeared with the village fire department, a hand-engine,

which he and several others proceeded to attach to a hydrant. A hose was then run into the church and the boys had the satisfaction of hearing the hissing of the water as it struck the fire below. Thirty minutes' fire-fighting, and they were able to scramble over a pile of charred chemicals, and confront their rescuer, who turned out to be none other than their former tutor, Monsieur Jemard.

He did not recognize them at first, for their faces were powder-stained and grimy with smoke and road-dust.

"We seem to keep track of each other, eh?" he said jovially, after he had been convinced of their identity. "Well, it was lucky for you boys that my battalion lost the brigade in the rear-guard fighting leaving Liège earlier to-day. We were forced to take a roundabout way to avoid a superior body of the enemy, and several miles from here we heard firing and decided to come over and investigate. I am delighted that we were able to help you. How did it happen?"

They told him their adventures in detail since leaving Liège.

"You have been lucky to get away at all," he said, when the story was ended. "I passed your automobile down the street, and noticed that the Germans had hopelessly smashed it. What you

had better do, now, I should think, is to march with us to-night, and as soon as we have reached our outposts near Hannut, you can go on to Brussels by the best means available. You can take a couple of the motor-cycles these Germans have abandoned, if you like.''

This plan appealed to the boys, and they agreed to adopt it, realizing that they had better not run any more risks of failing in the mission General Leman had entrusted to them. The road to Brussels had turned out a great deal more exciting than they had anticipated a few short hours before.

CHAPTER VI

THE EYES OF THE GENERAL STAFF

The march to Hannut was without incident, and Lieutenant Jemard's column was strong enough to intimidate the few Uhlan patrols scattered through this tract of country. At Hannut the boys were lucky enough to get seats in an automobile bound for Brussels with dispatches; and they reached the Belgian capital, after traversing a district which had not yet felt the impending threat of war, a few hours later.

Jack and Raoul were especially struck by the unruffled way in which the people of Brussels went about their daily occupations, notwithstanding the mobilization of troops and the erection of emergency fortifications. But for the unwonted activities of the Civil Guards, the digging of trenches and barbed-wire entanglements on the outskirts of the city, and the zig-zagged pits on all the roads, designed to hinder the enemy's traffic, the boys would have believed themselves in a land far removed from any danger of war.

As they drove through the aisles of the Forest of Soignes, which is little more than a huge park in the suburbs of Brussels, they saw nurse-maids walking with children or pushing baby-carriages, while the wealthier citizens drove about the pleasant roads in victorias and touring-cars, taking the air as they had been used to doing for years. Nowhere was there any indication of the panic which was to sweep over Brussels a couple of weeks later. Shop-keepers were at their counters; purchasers were numerous in the shopping section; business went on according to custom; and tram-cars and ordinary traffic bustled in the wide streets of the capital.

Jack gasped at the prosaic spectacle.

"Pinch me, Raoul," he begged. "Was it only last night we were up that church-tower with the Uhlans after us? Is Liège just over the hills, or have we dropped into South America by mistake?"

The staff-officer with them in the car laughed at the young American's way of putting it.

"I don't blame you," he said. "It must seem strange to you, who have come direct from the zone of real fighting. But here in Brussels, so far, the people know of the war only through the newspapers. It has not yet been brought home

to them. There has not even been posted a list of casualties. That will come to-day or to-morrow. Nobody expected war. In fact, many people still refuse to believe that war must come. They think this is some terrible political thunder-storm that will blow over in an afternoon."

"They should see the German shells pounding into Liège—those people," remarked Raoul.

"They will have their lesson soon enough," returned the officer sadly. "We shall have all we desire of war—and more, far more, I fear."

Their guide, who was a very pleasant chap, took them first to the immense Royal Palace, but here the King's Adjutant informed them that his Majesty was absent from the city, inspecting some of the defenses near Namur. So they drove to the Ministry of War, where they were at once ushered into the presence of the higher officers of the Belgian army. The boys were impressed by the democracy they saw all around them. It seemed as if the busiest and most important men had time to spare to them, as soon as it became known that they had a serious mission to perform.

In the presence of the Minister of War and the Chief of the General Staff, Raoul delivered the dispatch from General Leman, and then he and

Jack answered such questions as were put to them. The officers were particularly anxious to know what the prospect of the city's holding out might be.

"You say the Germans were actually in the city when you left?" asked one officer of high rank, whose chest was armored with sparkling decorations.

Jack explained to him at some length how the entry had been effected. After that the officers wished to know how the boys had escaped.

"That was a very clever piece of work," said the War Minister approvingly, when he had heard of the fight with the Uhlans from the church-tower. "I think I shall be able to find more work for you, if you have not yet had your fill."

The boys brought their heels together as they had seen officers do and saluted. The War Minister and his counselors smiled.

"I appreciate your willingness to serve Belgium," he said. "But first you must get some rest. Report to the Military Intelligence Bureau of the General Staff to-morrow. We are in great need of reliable information as to the enemy's movements along our front, and I think you boys are eminently fitted to do the work."

From the War Ministry Jack and Raoul set

out for the home of a cousin of Raoul's where Monsieur and Madame Heilleprin had planned to put up. But here they learned that Raoul's parents had departed the day before for Antwerp, leaving letters for them and a sum of money for any expenses which they might be obliged to contract.

"My dear Raoul," Monsieur Heilleprin wrote, "your mother has prevailed upon me to go to Antwerp, as she does not believe Brussels to be safe. I hope that you will follow us as soon as possible, but I do not know just what to say after receiving the enclosed cablegram from Mr. Morton. I do not wish Jack to be left alone, and I am inclined to believe that Mr. Morton is at least partly right, and that close observation of this present stage of the war must have a marked educational value. I have therefore determined to permit you to remain some time longer at Brussels, trusting that you will endeavor to follow the development of events as closely as possible, so that in after life you will be able to appreciate the hardships to which your country arbitrarily has been forced."

The cablegram from Jack's father ran as follows:

"Wish Jack to have first-rate opportunity to

follow this unprincipled raid upon Belgium. Consider it should have marked educational and constructive moral value for him to see exactly what war means."

After canvassing the two messages the boys decided that any bars which previously might have existed to prevent their acceptance of the offer made to them by the Minister of War were swept aside.

"Gosh," said Jack thoughtfully, as they went to bed, "I never thought father would be such a prince. Wonder why he did it? And why d'you s'pose your father fell in line with him, eh?"

"Can't say," replied Raoul sleepily. "Don't care s'long's we can do what we want."

And they slept all the rest of that afternoon and all night, too, as only tired boys can sleep, waking up in the morning fit as twin fiddles, with ravening appetites and zestful expectations of more interesting and hazardous adventures to be their lot in the near future.

The Military Intelligence Bureau of the General Staff turned out to be a suite of ordinary-looking offices that were rather disappointing at first glance. There was not anywhere near as much bustle visible to the eye as customarily prevailed about Monsieur Heilleprin's big factory at

Liège. Clerks worked at typewriters and filing-cabinets; officers sat at desks in little cubby-holes; and a few queer persons came and went. Few of them looked like military agents, however. They all were hang-dog in manner; frowsy in appearance; and distinctly sinister in the way they seemed to prefer to hug the wall in walking through corridors.

But presently Jack and Raoul were introduced to Major Baron de Quezonc, who presided over that phase of the work of the Bureau with which the boys were to be identified; and they speedily found themselves wrapped in the veil of mystery which they had supposed all along must be inseparable—as, indeed, it is—from all matters of military intelligence and information. The Baron was a stout little man, with waxed mustaches and a way of tapping the desk with his finger-tips when he wished to emphasize a point.

"Ah, young gentlemen," he said. "I am pleased to have your coöperation. His Excellency the Minister of War tells me you have already distinguished yourselves, that you are veterans, in fact." His eyes twinkled and the boys had to laugh, for all their new-won dignity. "Now, I have a piece of work for you which I believe you are eminently capable of performing. For the

last two days we have had evidence that German spies were stealing the plans for all our war-moves. Questions of policy which could have been learned in no other way have been in the possession of Berlin less than twenty-four hours after they were formulated.

"So daring are these spies that they do not hesitate to work all over the city. Recently signs appeared upon trees in the Forest of Soignes near all the water-courses, announcing in German, 'This is drinking water.' They were torn down, but I have just been informed by telephone that they were discovered again to-day. Other signs have been found giving directions to German troops as to how to reach the barracks, the residence of the Burgomaster, the chief city officials, and so forth. Some of these spies have been caught, but the most dangerous ones are still at large. What I want you to do is to go about the city with your eyes open, mixing in crowds, watching for any suspicious sign. See if you can't pick out for me the chief of all the spies. It's a large order, but I believe you can do it."

"We'll try, sir," promised Jack.

"Very good," said the Baron. "The instant you notice anything suspicious follow whoever is concerned in it, and if your suspicions are con-

firmed notify the police at once. In any case, report to me here this evening. That is all."

"I should say this was a large order," commented Raoul, when they were out in the street again. "I don't see why he doesn't use policemen; they ought to be better."

"I fancy the reason he picked us is that boys would be the last persons spies would suspect of shadowing them," replied Jack thoughtfully. "The best thing for us to do is simply to tramp around and watch people in the street. It's no use making a plan yet."

For hours Jack and Raoul strolled through the city streets, which were still fairly well crowded, although that morning there had been a considerable exodus for Antwerp and the coast towns. Every now and then one or the other would be attracted by some person they passed, and they would follow up the suspect; but invariably their suspicions were dissipated upon closer investigation. It was mid-afternoon when Jack suddenly touched Raoul on the arm and pointed to a carriage standing by the curb ahead of them. A lady was just getting into it. She was very stylishly dressed in a beautiful afternoon gown and big hat.

"What's wrong?" asked Raoul.

"Do you see anything queer about that woman?" returned his chum.

"No—why, hold on—I don't know, though. Perhaps. She's awfully stiff."

"You never saw your mother handle a train that way," said Jack. "Did you, now?"

The boys had pressed nearer as they talked, and now were quite close to the carriage. With a quick look around—which missed them entirely—the woman leaned forward and said to the driver on the box: "Drive to Maupin's."

It was her voice, not the words, which thrilled the scouts. The low, deep tones were not like any woman's voice either of them had ever heard. As the coachman drove on, they stood and looked at each other.

"Come on, we mustn't lose sight of her," urged Jack. "Hurry up. Let's see what she—I mean he—is going to do at Maupin's."

They had no difficulty in keeping the carriage within view until it reached Maupin's, which was a fashionable florist's. The woman got out at the curb and walked into the shop, with a heavy stride which was not noticed in the press on the sidewalk, but which served only to confirm the rising suspicions of the boys. They followed her inside as close as they dared.

Most of the clerks were busy, but the woman did not seem to be in any doubt as to what she should do. She walked straight through the shop into a green-house in the rear, where a gardener was working over some potted plants. The boys followed her and slipped into an aisle next to the one in which the gardener stood. At first they heard nothing, only a low mumble of voices. Peeking through a heavy bank of ferns, they saw that the woman was pretending to examine a small rose-bush, while she talked with the gardener. There was nobody within ear-shot of the conspirators—or so it seemed to them—and presently they involuntarily raised their voices.

"It's getting dangerous, I tell you," the boys heard the gardener mutter.

"Can't help it, Hans," retorted the woman in rumbling chest-tones, as "she" pinched a bud. "We're here for a purpose. Chances have to be taken. You'd get off easier than I, at any rate."

"They nabbed Schnitzel yesterday," went on the gardener. "Just as he was clipping the wires from the military telephone exchange."

"Ah, but Schnitzel was a fool," answered the spy dressed in woman's clothes. "He always was clumsy."

"Well, I'm getting tired of it," grumbled the gardener.

"Have you got those duplicate plans of the Namur forts?"

"No, Slemke is to have them for me at six to-night."

"Good." A look of satisfaction stole over the "woman's" face. "Bring Slemke with you this evening at six-thirty. I shall have fresh orders."

"Where are you now?"

The "woman" looked around cautiously.

"Rue Nyautey Fifty-four," "she" answered. "Ask for Madame Selnard."

The spy put down the rose-bush.

"No," "she" said. "It is too expensive. I will try elsewhere."

The boys were close behind "her" as "she" walked through the crowded shop, but at the door Raoul clutched Jack by the arm.

"Hadn't we better wait?" he suggested. "Suppose we go to the Baron and tell him what we have heard. Then we can go to the Rue Nyautey Fifty-four this evening and capture all of this gang. That will be better than taking just one, even if that one is the ring-leader."

Jack had been on the point of rushing forward and seizing the spy, while he shouted for the po-

lice, but he could not deny the common-sense in his chum's reasoning. So, reluctantly, the boys watched the "woman" drive off, following "her" only far enough to make certain that "she" was really driving in the direction of that section of the city where lay the Rue Nyautey.

The Baron de Quezonc listened to their story with breathless interest. Before they had finished it he was at his telephone issuing orders.

"Plans of the Namur forts?" he said, when they came to this part of the conversation. "Ah, that is half the battle. Now, I can put my finger upon the Bureau in which the leak is located. Even if we get no more out of your work, young gentlemen, that piece of information alone has justified your employment."

At six o'clock, he had half a dozen motor-cars brought around to a side entrance of the War Ministry, and into these the boys were loaded, together with twenty members of the Military Secret Service and several officers of the General Staff, the whole detachment commanded by de Quezonc. Several blocks from the Rue Nyautey the column of automobiles stopped, and the party were given their final instructions. The Secret Service men were to surround the block on which Fifty-four was situated, so that if by any chance

the spies escaped the search-party under de Quezonc, they might still be captured.

Then de Quezonc and the boys, with the officers, set off for Fifty-four, which they found to be a very handsome apartment house of the better class. The porter at the door opened promptly when he saw their uniforms, and in some terror admitted that a Madame Selnard, a large woman, answering to the boys' description, had taken a third-floor apartment earlier in the week.

De Quezonc led the way to this apartment. His ring was answered by a man in ordinary clothes who stared with mouth agape at the uniforms in the hallway.

"You're under arrest," said de Quezonc, briskly. "Where are the rest of your friends?"

The man simply stared back at him, unable to answer, but the chief of the spies was equal to the situation.

Brushing aside some portieres which led into a reception room, the "woman" whom the boys had seen that afternoon in the carriage, dressed even more magnificently than "she" had been in some trailing black stuff, appeared before them.

"What do you wish, gentlemen?" asked this person in deep, yet soft tones, that might have passed for an extraordinary contralto.

"Your arrest," snapped de Quezonc. "Don't resist."

"My arrest?" repeated the spy. "For what?"

"For"—de Quezonc started to say, but he broke off as Jack, immediately behind him, shouted:

"Look out, that fellow's reaching for a gun!"

Indeed, the spy's hand had darted down into the folds of "her" dress and when it flashed up again it was armed with a blued automatic. "She" sprang forward, regardless of "her" skirts, and as "she" sprang another man leaped from the portieres behind "her." The two of them struck the group in the doorway like foot-ball players bucking the line, and they smashed through the Belgians, hurling them right and left. De Quezonc sputtered something as he was bowled over, and his gun went off. The boys escaped the impact by dodging to one side, and the Germans dashed through the hall past them, making for a flight of stairs that led to the roof. The one in woman's clothes was tearing at his skirt, trying to get rid of it.

"You take him; I'll take the other," called Jack to Raoul, as the two shot out of the mêlée in the doorway, and as he spoke the American boy wrapped himself around the legs of the spy who had last appeared, bringing him down the stairs

he had started to ascend with a crash that shook the house and all the breath out of Jack's body. Raoul was quick to apprehend the trick, and he contrived to grab hold of the flying garments of the chief spy as they fluttered past him. This grip he improved by a flying tackle, which brought his prize and himself in a sprawling heap on top of Jack and the second spy.

De Quezonc and his friends were on hand before the spies had recovered their senses, and when the boys stood up they found the Germans handcuffed and weaponless.

"You need not humiliate me so, gentlemen," protested the spy in woman's clothes, his cheeks hot with anger, as he thrust forward his manacled hands. "I am a German officer. I will give you my parole."

"You may be a German officer," replied de Quezonc grimly, "but a man who will go to the lengths you have gone is not to be trusted."

The man who had opened the doors to the Belgians had not joined in the fight, and upon examination the boys found out that he was the gardener in the florist's shop, the man the chief spy had addressed as Hans. He proved much more compliant than his accomplices, and after some cross-examination broke down completely, and

showed de Quezonc where the plans of the Namur forts had been secreted, awaiting an opportunity to send them across the border by carrier pigeon. According to this man, the spy in skirts was the chief German secret agent in Brussels and the entire spy system centered about him. But to protect it against just such a disaster as had befallen that night, the system was divided up into squads and the only man who knew the members of all the squads was the chief. The others knew only the two or three or four men they worked with, as the case might be.

After the spies were brought to the street, there was a slight delay while the automobiles came up, and a large crowd collected. The Belgians protected their prisoners from bodily injury, but they could not prevent the bystanders from yelling: "Down with the German traitors!" "Cowards that eat our bread and betray us!" and other worse epithets. The chief of the spies did not appear to mind this clamor at all. He smiled coolly and asked one of his captors to reach in a pocket and get him a cigarette.

"The crowd must always have something to throw mud at," he said. Then spying Jack, he called to him: "Ah, there, you little chap, it was

you who bagged us, they tell me. That was sharp work, boy. You ought to be a German."

"I'm glad I'm not," returned Jack shortly.

"Ah, well, each to his taste." The German smiled cheerily, and, prodded by a Secret Service man, fell into a seat in one of the automobiles.

On the way back to the War Ministry Baron de Quezonc insisted upon depositing the Scouts at the house of Raoul's cousin where they were staying.

"The rest of this will be an unpleasant business," he remarked significantly. "Best stay out of it, boys. Besides, you've had a hard day. Rest up and be on hand to-morrow. Belgium thanks you for another efficient bit of work."

The next day the boys realized what he had meant when he said "the rest of this will be an unpleasant business." The early morning editions contained lurid accounts of the execution at the barracks of three German spies caught red-handed the night before. Justice had not lagged.

CHAPTER VII

WITH THE CAVALRY SCREEN

When Jack and Raoul reported at the War Ministry the next day, expecting orders for another spy-hunt, they were surprised to receive instructions to report to the general in command of the cavalry screen at Diest for service as messengers.

"I think we have knocked the head off the German spy-system in Brussels," said their friend the Baron. "And we have just received an urgent request for efficient messengers from the commanding officer at Diest. He has lost several officers in skirmishes and needs all he has left to handle his troops. I think you will find it an interesting experience. There is big work under way in that section of the field."

The boys were delighted, and boarded the first train for Diest, a train loaded entirely with soldiers and stores. They were now provided with special military passes empowering them to go anywhere through the Belgian lines, and as a result of the stories told about their exploits

they found that the soldiers they traveled with were not ignorant of their identity. But both Jack and Raoul were modest by disposition and not given to thrusting themselves forward. They preferred to sit and listen to the opinions of the older men about them, rather than to talk loudly of their own experiences.

They reached Diest late in the afternoon and went at once to the headquarters of the commander. He was very busy and turned them over to his adjutant, who read the letter they carried from the Baron, and then saw to it that they secured accommodations in the same building with the rest of the staff.

"Unless I'm mistaken, the general will have a place ready for you lads in no time," said the adjutant. "Our job, you know, is to screen the preparations of the Field Army and prevent the Germans from learning our defensive plans. As they have plenty of cavalry and we are scant on horses, it's a job that grows more difficult from day to day. In the last two days they have been pushing up toward Tongres, St. Trond, and Hannut. Some of our chaps had a stiff fight this morning and cut up the Uhlans. Make yourselves comfortable to-night. You'll remember a comfortable bed with regret later on."

The boys laughed, but took him at his word, although they spent the early part of the evening lounging around the town, watching the Belgian engineers erecting wire entanglements, trenches, and gun-emplacements at strategic points in the outlying districts and around the bridge that was the sole entrance from the east.

In the morning they were summoned by the general, a lean, active man, with fierce eyes that he bent upon them as though he intended to read their inmost thoughts.

"Are you afraid?" he demanded with a scowl.

They looked at him in some amazement.

"Are you afraid?" he demanded again, slightly raising his voice.

"No, sir," said Jack uncertainly. "At least, I don't think we are."

The general looked at them a little less fiercely; Raoul said afterward that he winked, but he wasn't sure.

"You are honest, at any rate," commented the general, after a pause. "Well, I have some dangerous work for you—for both of you. I understand you are volunteers. Therefore you are not bound to obey my commands in this particular."

"We haven't taken advantage of that exemption yet, sir," remarked Raoul.

"I wish to know what is going on out there," the general went on, without noticing the interruption—he indicated "out there" by a broad sweep of his arm toward an eastern window. "My patrols tell me a certain amount of things. Country people and refugees tell me more. But that is not enough. I must know certainly, apart from rumor, what is going on inside the German picket-lines. For example, I have no reliable news from Liège, beyond the fact that the firing of the forts can still be heard in the vicinity. There are many other things. All of them I must know. The question is: Will you two lads go and find them out for me, where all my troopers have failed?"

"If you think we are worth trusting in the matter, sir," returned Jack.

"Eh?" The general scowled at him until Jack began to fear he had said something wrong. "I don't know whether you are worth trusting—shan't know until you report whether you've failed or succeeded. But I do believe you stand more chance of sifting through the German lines than grown men. There are so many thousands of refugees about the countryside that if you are circumspect you should get through."

"What are your orders, sir?" asked Raoul.

"Here." The general handed him a thick en-

velope. "Take that to the officer commanding the outposts at Tirlemont. He will send a squadron with you. You will ride about as close to the enemy's lines as possible until you get your chance. That is all."

An hour later they drove out of Diest in an automobile escorted by motor-cycle troops. When they reached Tirlemont they found the place in an uproar. There had been a raid by a strong German cavalry column the day before, and the Belgians were now pressing the enemy back toward their base in the country around Liège. The local commander was just mounting to lead reinforcements to the front as the boys arrived.

"I can't give you any time now," he said. "You'd best follow me. No, not in the car. Much of this is cross-country work. A horse is best. I'll have the orderlies bring you two."

And that was how the boys happened to find themselves riding boot to boot with a squadron of the famous Belgian Guides in hot pursuit of the German raiders, who were falling back as rapidly as possible to Waremme. It was hammer-and-tongs work. Scurry and charge by the Belgians; check as the Germans seized upon some village or wood which offered shelter and a chance to use their machine guns. Then scurry and charge as

the Belgians outflanked the defensive position and menaced the Germans' retreat. Jack secured a lance from a dead soldier, while Raoul found a carbine, and together they rode in the remorseless pursuit that harried the Germans up to their lines.

That night the Belgian cavalry bivouacked at Landen, an important railroad center which had already been captured and recaptured several times. About the camp-fire, after a hasty meal, the boys had their first opportunity of handing their instructions to the commander.

"Well," he said. "You've gained some idea to-day of what our life is like. How do you like it?"

They said they liked it immensely. It was the truth. There was something about the mad, dashing pace at which all the little cavalry battles were fought that was most exhilarating, providing one kept body and soul together through it all.

"To-morrow I'll see about detailing an escort for you," continued the commander. "The horses are worn out to-night, and must have a rest—if the enemy permit."

But the next morning he put them off again.

"Orders from the general at Diest," he explained. "We have information through which we expect to get the Germans in a trap there. All

detachments are being drawn in to strengthen our force.''

Their disappointment must have shown on the faces of the boys, for the cavalryman slapped them on the shoulder jovially.

''Don't you worry, lads,'' he assured them. ''Your chance is coming. This is an emergency measure. But it won't last long.''

As a matter of fact, the boys were glad afterward that they were permitted to participate in the sharp engagement at Diest and the neighboring village of Haelen, three miles to the southeast. The troops with whom Jack and Raoul rode were sent into a patch of woods near Haelen to await a chance to charge the Germans in flank as soon as they were shaken by the ambushed guns in the village street. Here, as on a larger scale at Diest, the main objective of the German attack, the Belgians' preparations had been very thorough.

At Haelen every house was held in force and loop-holed for rifle and machine-gun fire, while an old fort which commanded the main street was cover for a field battery. When the German column charged into the village, led by the 17th Dragoons, the Belgians held their fire until the entire force of the enemy was under their gun-muzzles.

Then they let drive with rifles, machine-guns, and shrapnel, and the Germans were blown to pieces by the hundred. Notwithstanding this terrible reception, so high was the gallantry of the attackers that a few of the Dragoons, who contrived by a miracle to pass safe through the tornado of fire in the village street, actually galloped up the glacis of the old fort and were shot down by the gunners.

A few minutes of this awful punishment took the heart out of even the picked corps of the German army, however, and they broke in precipitate flight.

This was the chance for which Jack and Raoul's party had been waiting. They stormed out of their cover and took the luckless Germans in the flank, crumpling them up and bagging prisoners by the score. All the way back to St. Trond and beyond the pursuit lasted; and it was made all the more bitter when the stampede of attackers from Diest joined the body that had failed at Haelen. For at Diest they had failed still more disastrously. The Death's Head Hussars, the best-known cavalry regiment in the German army, was cut to pieces and lost its standard—the first time in its history. Peasants who buried the dead

the following days counted 2,800 corpses in the blue-gray uniform of the German army.

In the meantime, too, another column of German cavalry, supported by Jaegers, or riflemen, and artillery, had been flung against the Belgian right wing at Eghezée. The Belgians and a French cavalry division which had come to their assistance, were ready for the enemy here, as at Diest and Haelen, though, and the Germans advanced to the attack only to find themselves caught in flank and compelled to retreat with the loss of a number of their guns.

This fighting, while it did not personally concern Jack and Raoul, had considerable influence upon their future movements, as these two serious checks sufficed for several days to clear the country intervening between the hostile armies of the swarms of Uhlan patrols which had made travel impossible with less than a regiment. Emboldened by their success, too, the Belgian cavalry pushed forward their outposts again and reclaimed temporarily much of the devastated territory they had been compelled to abandon to the Germans. A small column, consisting of a squadron of the Guides and several armored motor-cars, equipped with machine-guns, was delegated to act as escort to the Scouts. Their orders were to

avoid combat whenever possible, but to fight without hesitation if they were pressed or there was anything to be gained by it.

They struck off northeasterly toward Maeseyck, near the frontier, and then turned and worked their way southward through the No Man's Land that lay between the two armies. Neither of the boys would have believed that less than two weeks of war could have wrought such devastation as they beheld on every hand. The countryside was swept bare, just as if some huge giant had come along with a universal broom and brushed all humanity out of his way. Villages were wrecked or burned; crops stood rotting in the fields; not so much as a chicken clucked a welcome to the column, as it rode cautiously along, flankers out on every side and a strong point, or scouting party, ahead of the advance-guard.

In the neighborhood of Hasselt their escort halted, and the boys set out on their first venture alone. They were provided with requisite disguises to enable them to pass for peasants, fleeing from their village to the Dutch frontier; and they had prepared a detailed story for use in case they were cross-questioned by any German patrol. From Hasselt they struck across the fields in the general direction of Liège, along the right bank

of the Herck river where it passes between St. Trond and Tongres. Their chief desire was to avoid meeting Germans, if possible, and glean what information they could from country people. But if it looked feasible, they also intended to attempt to get close enough to the German lines around Liège to gain some notion of the situation at first hand.

Because they traveled over fields and through thickets and meadow-land, avoiding even the by-paths, their progress was necessarily slow. Toward noon they came to a large farmhouse, standing peacefully in the midst of its out-buildings, gates open, no smoke curling from the chimney. But it seemed impossible that it could have been deserted, so settled was its appearance, and the boys knocked on the door. There was no answer, and after a second knock they entered. All about them were evidences of a hurried flight, yet there was no disorder, and it was plain that no alien hand had pillaged the house since its occupants fled probably several days before. Plates stood on the table in the big kitchen. A loaf of bread, half cut away, with the knife still in it, was placed beside a jug of milk. They found the fire out, but wood was at hand to kindle it again, and in the cupboard was an abundance of provi-

sions. In a jiffy Jack had the fire going, and Raoul was proving his French blood by dishing up an appetizing meal.

They ate leisurely, with no thought of their situation, and one was as surprised as the other at the sudden battering of hoofs in the lane without.

"Who——" began Jack.

Raoul shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the use?" he answered. "The smoke brought them, and they are too close for us to make a dash."

A harsh voice shouted something in German, the hoofs thudded in the farm-yard, and an instant later a lance-butt rammed against the door.

"He says 'Who's inside?' " translated Raoul, who understood German, like all lads living along the frontier.

"Open the door," advised Jack. "We're safe enough. Tell 'em we were left in charge. They'll very likely ride off and leave us alone."

Raoul threw the door open, and a burly Uhlan pushed his horse up the low step and peered around inside. An instant later he withdrew and bellowed something to his comrades in the lane, whereupon they all scampered up.

"Who are you?" demanded the sergeant in command.

"We were left in charge by the proprietor," replied Raoul. "I am his son. This fellow with me is one of the hands."

The sergeant looked at him suspiciously.

"You weren't here when we passed day before yesterday," he returned.

"No," admitted Raoul. "We stayed away from the house, but we were told your people would not harm us, so we returned this morning."

"Umph," said the sergeant. Then suddenly: "Seen any Belgians near here?"

"No, sir," replied Raoul quite honestly.

"Well, that's queer. They've been pretty thick hereabouts in the last few days. I think you'd better come with me. The captain will want to question you. Some of you country boys know more than you let on." The sergeant turned away after designating two troopers to guard them. "Conrad, Ludwig," he called. "Get inside and see if there's anything worth taking. We'll carry off what we can and bring back wagons for the rest."

The boys were strapped to the stirrups of their guards when the sergeant had completed his investigation of the farm; and in this wise they

made the return march. It was far from comfortable. Part of the way the Uhlans trotted, and all the way there were heavy clouds of dust which the pelting hoofs of the horses drove into the eyes and noses of the boys. They passed several other patrols, some going out and some returning from reconnaissance duty; and occasionally a trooper would inquire why the sergeant didn't shoot his captives off-hand.

"Oh, they've done nothing yet," replied the sergeant easily, to one ferocious dragoon, whose comments were most blood-thirsty.

"They're all spies and traitors!" retorted the other. "Tie 'em up to stumps and use your lances on them. It's good practice, and that's all they are worth. We used half a dozen of them that way at Waremme."

This kind of talk made Jack and Raoul distinctly uncomfortable, but whether their captor was unusually kind-hearted or whether it was because he hoped to get valuable information out of them, he saw to it that they were subjected to none but the more or less necessary discomforts of their peculiar mode of travel. They rode into the German cavalry camp in a village near Tongres, dusty, thirsty, and footsore, but otherwise no worse for the experience. The sergeant or-

dered them placed in a brick-walled room in one of the larger cottages, close to the village wine-shop which had been converted into local head-quarters; and after what seemed an interminable wait, in the course of which their guards did consent to give them water, but no food, they were brought before the German commander, a pompous young colonel, who was called Count and treated with huge respect by the officers around him.

It was evident that he was not inclined to attach much importance to Jack and Raoul. The dust which coated them was the best confirmation of their disguises that they could have obtained. They looked more than ever like what they claimed to be—stolid farm-lads. And Jack heightened the effect by acting like a clown, permitting his jaw to gape and his eyes to goggle as if he were half an idiot.

"Well, well," said the commander testily. "What was your idea in bringing these yokels in here, sergeant?"

"If it pleases you, High and Well-born sir," answered the sergeant, saluting punctually, "we found them in a farmhouse that had been reported as deserted, and they could give no satisfactory account of themselves. They said they had

not seen any Belgian troops in the neighborhood, although they had been in the house for two days, and we know Belgians were about there yesterday, at the least."

"Well, well, prisoners, what have you to say to this?" demanded the commander more testily than ever.

Raoul bowed almost to the floor, and, affecting great humbleness, replied:

"We are only poor farm-lads, Highness, and we know nothing about the war. My father bade us look after the farm, when he and the others fled, and we stayed. But we saw no soldiers, because we hid in a hayrick beyond the barn until this morning, when we ventured out through hunger. The honorable sergeant can find the rick if he visits the farm again. It is on the southeast of the barn, over by the turnip-field, where——"

"Tut, tut," interrupted the colonel. "That will do. You see, sergeant, it is just as I surmised. These stupid fellows are no use to us. You will not gain the Iron Cross by such services. We cannot secure valuable information from idiots."

The sergeant looked abashed, and Raoul picked up courage to inquire:

"Then can we go, Highness?"

"Go?" roared the officer.

"Can we go free, Highness?"

"Certainly not," shouted the colonel indignantly. "The idea! You will be put to work with the gang repairing the railroad—and you had better be glad you are not shot. You richly deserve it—I daresay!"

The boys regarded each other blankly. This was more than they had bargained for. But the only thing to do was to make the best of it, and watch for the first chance that came along. From the Headquarters house they were taken to a brick-walled yard where were crowded several hundred other unfortunates, civilian prisoners who were compelled by the Germans to repair the damage which had been wrought by retreating Belgian troops to the railway line which runs from Liège through Tongres to Hasselt and St. Trond.

They got no supper that night, and early the next morning, after a breakfast of thin vegetable soup, they were marched out with the rest of the prisoners, under an armed guard, and put to work on a shattered embankment some distance on the right of way beyond Tongres in the direction of Hasselt. German engineer officers directed the work, and engineer troops did all the jobs re-

quiring skill and expert knowledge. The Belgians were employed simply as navvies.

During the morning Jack and Raoul worked vigorously and attracted the favorable notice of one of the officers.

"That's right," he said. "Men who give their best to this will get their food from our own mess. Go on as you are doing."

A few minutes later a party of high officers rode up in an automobile and alighted to inspect the work. The engineer officer escorted them to a point on the embankment close to where the Scouts were digging with pick and shovel.

"You see for yourself how it is, General," remarked the engineer. "The enemy made a fearful wreck of the roadbed in retiring. We must practically build it all over again, and his cavalry are so active that we can only push ahead as fast as we secure a certain grip on the country."

"I recognize your difficulties," replied the general impassively. "But I can only give you four days—at the most. You may have as much assistance as you require, a division, if necessary. But this roadbed must be completed in four days. Eight army corps are held up in Aix waiting for the completion of this line. The whole campaign is at stake."

After the Germans had moved away Raoul nudged Jack, and recounted to him what he had just overheard. Jack listened with glistening eyes.

"Now, we've just got to get away," he declared. "That's one of the things we were sent out for, Raoul. We must get away."

"Yes," agreed Raoul, the practical. "But how?"

"Leave that to me," said Jack.

He had not the slightest idea of what he was going to do, but he possessed absolute confidence in his ability to devise a scheme in time.

When the German bugles blew at the noon-hour the Belgians were marched down beside the track and given another cheerless meal of dish-water soup. But Jack and Raoul and a handful of others, whose diligence had attracted the attention of the kind-hearted engineer officer, were taken to the other side of the embankment where the railroad guards had their bivouac and served with food from the camp-kitchen which accompanied the Germans. One sentry was nominally told off to keep an eye upon them, but he paid very little attention to the prisoners' movements, inasmuch as the last thing the Germans expected

was that one of the spiritless crowd should possess the gumption to escape.

A little wood grew close up beside the tracks at this point, and in the clearing in which the German camp was pitched stood an ordinary construction shanty, a rambling building of planks thrown hastily together. After they had finished their meal, Jack and Raoul walked carelessly to the far side of this shanty, taking care to remain in full view of the sentry. Presently, when the other prisoners were being formed up to be marched back to work, he called to them. But Jack called back to him, pointing energetically toward the wood as he spoke. The sentry, his curiosity aroused, sauntered over, utterly unsuspecting.

As he rounded the corner of the building, Jack walked on a few steps, removing the group entirely from the view of the others in the clearing. Before the German knew it, the two boys were on him. Jack made a flying tackle and caught him about the thighs, while Raoul pinioned his shoulders, and he came to the ground breathless and helpless. When he scrambled to his feet the prisoners and his rifle had vanished, and only a few fluttering boughs in the outer edge of the woods showed the way they had gone.

CHAPTER VIII

SEVERAL ESCAPES AND A RESCUE

As the boys dodged through the tree-trunks they heard the startled yell of the sentry, followed by an outcry from his comrades, and presently by a sputter of rifle-fire as the guards shot haphazard into the woods. An officer evidently stopped this waste of ammunition, and the next sound that reached the ears of the boys was the breaking of branches and under-brush as heavy bodies forced their way through. The pursuit was on. But by this time Jack and Raoul had gained a considerable head-start on the Germans, and thanks to the thickness of the forest-growth at this point, they were invisible to their pursuers. Also, their smaller size enabled them to slip along much more rapidly than the bulky soldiers.

What the boys feared most was the possibility of cavalry cutting across their path and rounding them up when they reached the farther side of the wood. They had little doubt of their ability to shake off the infantrymen on their

heels. But before half an hour had elapsed they could see a thinning out of the trees ahead of them, which meant that they were coming to open country, and they were obliged to diminish their pace, so as to have opportunity to reconnoiter the lay of the land. Through the branches they saw an oat field, untouched, and beyond it the ruins of a house. Otherwise the landscape was untenanted.

"Down on your hands and knees, Raoul," ordered Jack, flinging himself onto the ground.

And one after the other they crawled from the wood into the mazes of the oats, taking infinite pains not to rustle the fluttering tops. Jack dragged beside him the gun he had taken from the sentry. It had a bayonet attached and five cartridges in the magazine, so that they were not altogether unarmed. From time to time Raoul looked back, but they succeeded in gaining the shelter of the house long before the Germans who were following them had emerged from the woods. In front of this house ran a sunken lane, through which they scuttled after a single glance up and down to make sure there were no gray troopers to cry "Halt!"

The country to the north was somewhat more wooded than that to the south and west, so they

struck off "toward Holland," as Raoul said, working to the westward in the direction of the Belgian lines, wherever they were afforded cover. The sunken lane was good only for a few hundred yards. At the first corner they saw in the distance a German sentry leaning idly on his rifle at the entrance to a village. Climbing a gulley in the side of the lane, they found themselves in an open meadow, with a low fence their sole protection from observation.

They stole along this fence, reached a patch of alders, and then forded a shallow brook. They had escaped the detection of their pursuers by these complicated maneuvers, but at the same time they had very foolishly lost their sense of direction. Emerging from the alders on the farther side of the brook, they stepped out into another bare field, and as they did so a faint shout reached their ears and close behind it whistled a volley of bullets. The boys looked to the left, and there, pressing up around the house by the sunken lane—back upon which they had doubled—were the German guards they had so industriously eluded.

There was nothing for it but to dodge back into the protection of the alders and to sprint up the bed of the brook, hugging the shelter of its low

banks. The Germans were close behind them, though, spread out on either side of the water-course, and it was not so easy to fog the trail as it had been in the woods. The boys ran for all they were worth, and presently they were panting. Now and then, too, the Germans paused to fire, and some of their bullets whisked uncomfortably close. It was just in the nick of time that Raoul, running slightly behind Jack, saw a hollow in the bank under the clawing roots of a giant willow, and motioned to the American lad to seek shelter in this natural cave.

They burrowed into it as far as they could and were surprised to find how commodious it was. Some of the huge roots arched over the front of it, and with the bayonet of his captured rifle Jack hastily brushed together a heap of leaves and moss that choked the hole by which they had entered. The shadows cast by the branches of the willow and the neighboring trees did the rest, and when the Germans reached the spot they did not give it a single glance.

"Cricky!" said Jack a quarter of an hour later, as, dirty and cramped, the two crawled out of their cave. "That wasn't any fun."

"Yes," agreed Raoul, "and it was a good thing

we remembered the Scouting rules and only stepped in the water, so as not to leave a trail."

A cautious survey of the brook-bed failed to reveal any Germans, and the boys set out in a northwesterly direction past an empty farmhouse and into a second patch of woods, much smaller than the one into which they had first escaped. From its farther side, by way of cleared and uncleared fields, they proceeded slowly, always edging over toward Hasselt, where their escort awaited them.

It was mid-afternoon, now, and they were getting along famously. They had not seen a sign of a German, having passed into the No Man's Land previously alluded to, which formed a belt between the two armies. This territory was crossed only by the patrols and scouts of Belgians and Germans, and the boys knew that with a little luck they should have no difficulty in winning free at last. But luck was not with them at that moment.

They entered the park surrounding a substantial country-house, or château, and worked through the timber onto the front lawn. So far, so good. Then an evil genius tempted them to leave the park, where the walking was rough, for a narrow lane that ran along the other side

of a stone wall. They scaled a tree, and swung over the wall by its branches. Jack made the ascent first. As Raoul was swinging up after him, he heard a sudden guttural exclamation, the excited neigh of a horse, and his chum's voice in an appeal for help.

The Belgian boy never stopped to reflect that he was unarmed. He caught hold of an elastic branch, gave a spring into the air and sailed over the wall—to drop with mathematical precision upon the shoulders of a German Hussar who was trying to help a comrade saber Jack, whom they had maneuvered against the wall, where he had no room for his bayonet. Raoul grasped the situation in a single flash as he struck the German, hurling him from his saddle, and seizing the man's sword he rushed to Jack's help. But Jack did not need him. With only one foe to attend to, he managed to leap back far enough out of saber-swing to bring his rifle to his shoulder. The German promptly tried to rush him, but the young American fired at point-blank range, and the hussar reeled backwards from his saddle, a bullet in his brain.

"You look after the horses," said Raoul swiftly. "Wait a second."

He ran back along the wall to the corner,

peered around, and then, with a warning cry, raced back as fast as he could.

"Mount! mount!" he called, as he ran. "These fellows were the point of a squadron. Their friends are coming."

A throaty German bugle-call furnished sufficient proof of the seriousness of the new plight the boys found themselves in, and without more delay Jack climbed into the saddle of one horse, while Raoul mounted the other. Neither bothered about finding the stirrups, but urging the beasts to a gallop, they fled up the lane. They had not gone far when a wild yell behind them told that the Germans had discovered two bodies at the foot of the park-wall. The boys did not try to look back. They galloped on, shifting from one road to another as occasion offered, darting into farm-yards and across fields, in a constant effort to bewilder their latest pursuers.

After an hour of this work, the horses began to show traces of weariness, and they reined in. They had come miles out of the track they intended to pursue to regain Hasselt, and were now over toward St. Trond, still in the No Man's Land, but rather dangerously situated on the road followed by German raiding parties returning from excursions against the Belgian outposts. About

five o'clock in the afternoon they sighted the village of Wellen, which is on the right of the railroad from Tongres to St. Trond.

The sun was setting behind them, and in fear lest they should be silhouetted against the crest of a slight rise, they turned their horses from the path they had been following and rode behind a clump of farm buildings. Their eyes were on the distant horizon, searching always for signs of Uhlans or Hussar patrols, and it was the start of Jack's horse that gave them their first warning that some other human being was in the neighborhood.

As his animal reared up, Jack cast an involuntary look about him, and saw a strange, mad figure that ran staggering from behind a hayrick, with hands outstretched, making unintelligible outcries and gesticulations. After the first feeling of alarm, the boys realized that the man was harmless. Indeed, they thought he was merely some poor country fellow who had been driven crazy by his sufferings and the sight of the awful ruin that had been wrought on his home. But as he came nearer it was evident to them that he was not dressed like a peasant. Tattered, dirty, haggard though he was, there was yet something about the man that bespoke the soldier. It did

not require the remnants of uniform he wore to identify him.

He was very weak. Before he reached them he tottered and fell, and Jack hastily dismounted and ran to his assistance, for, whoever the man was, whether Belgian or German, he obviously needed help.

"Who—are—you?" muttered the man hoarsely as Jack helped him to his feet.

Something in the voice, rather than in the muddy, scratched face aroused a train of remembrance in Jack's brain. He studied the blank features for an instant, then called to his chum:

"Raoul, it's Captain Montjuit! Don't you remember him? Captain Montjuit of General Leman's staff at Liège."

Captain Montjuit still had strength enough left to appreciate the friendly accents in which the boy spoke, but he did not recognize him.

"Belgians," he whispered approvingly, and keeled over in a dead faint.

The boys looked at each other. This was a pretty situation. Here they were, with the man who probably bore the key to the situation of the beleaguered fortress, with the enemy all about them, night coming on, and no means of getting

"RAOUL! IT'S CAPTAIN MONTJUIT!!"

aid. What should they do? They had no time to waste. That much was evident.

"We must get him on a horse, one way or another," said Raoul at last.

"And to do that, we've got to make him able to help us a little," supplemented Jack.

The American boy went to the horses and searched among the impedimenta strapped onto the saddles until he found a canteen, full of raw Schnapps, a prize its former owner had picked up in the course of his raiding. Some of the spirits they poured on Captain Montjuit's forehead, massaging it gently, and slapping his hands the while; and when they had gotten a sigh out of him, Jack forced the mouth of the canteen between the officer's teeth and gave him a choking swallow of the fiery stuff. Captain Montjuit opened his eyes and made a convulsive effort to sit up, only to sink back with a groan.

"Where am I?" he murmured.

"You're all right, sir," Raoul told him cheerfully.

The captain looked at them dully.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"We're Belgians," sad Jack. "Don't you remember us? We are the boys General Leman sent from Liège with his last message."

"Not—his—last—message," replied Captain Montjuit faintly. "I bear that."

The boys exchanged a look.

"Then Liège has fallen?" asked Raoul.

The officer nodded slightly.

"Yes," he said. "Fort Loncin went last—yesterday afternoon—crumbled to pieces. It was the .42 centimeter shells—nothing could stand—against them."

He seemed fainter again. Jack once more inserted the canteen between his teeth and poured a huge gulp of the Schnapps down his throat. The officer coughed and by a great effort, with their assistance, was able to sit up.

"I am all in," he said, with his first trace of authority. "You must leave me. No, do as I say. Leave me. Ride to the nearest outpost. Give my message."

"But we can take you with us, sir," interposed Jack.

"Do as I say," snapped Montjuit. "I have no breath to argue with you. Deliver my message. The King must know Liège has fallen. We did our best—but no matter about that. The whole German army is free, now, and it will be on the march within twenty-four hours, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of men. I saw the ad-

vance-guard; no man could describe it. A horde of gray locusts spreading over the earth. You must ride and tell the King."

He sagged as he finished, but the boys held him up.

"Somehow or other, Raoul," declared Jack, "we've got to get him on one of those horses. I'll hold him, while you bring a horse."

This was easier said than done. The horses shied at the prone figure of the man, and refused to stand still to let the boys lift him on their backs, no light task in itself, for he was heavier than either one of them. At last, at Raoul's suggestion, they picked him up by the head and feet and carried him into the farmyard, depositing him on the roof of a hen-house. Then Raoul brought up his horse and hitched him beside the hen-house. After this, it was comparatively easy to slide the unconscious officer onto the saddle and tie him in place with a picket-rope.

Long before this operation had been completed, however, it was pitch dark. The boys resumed their road again by the light of the stars, and here the training Jack's father had given him in Mexico was used to good purpose. Most boys would have been entirely at a loss in a strange

and hostile country in the darkness, with only foes around them and a most precarious way to safety. But Jack singled out Polaris, the trusty Pole-star, in the tail of the Little Dipper, and with this, instead of compass, and Raoul's superficial knowledge of the contour of the surrounding country, they contrived to follow a course which was roughly in the direction of Hasselt.

Raoul, who was slightly lighter than Jack, rode behind Captain Montjuit, but he was very cramped in this position, and twice Jack spilled him. At other times, when they were going slow in wooded tracts, Raoul would dismount and walk beside the horse. Three times they withdrew from the road to permit the passage of German patrols. Once a whole regiment of cavalry, with a horse-battery, passed on its way back from a feint at the Belgian lines between Hasselt and St. Trond.

It was past midnight when the worn-out riders heard the challenge of the Belgian sentries on the road outside of Hasselt, and no words ever sounded so good in their ears as the stern:

"Qui va la?"

Having satisfied the pickets of their identity, the boys were passed back through the lines, and the squadron commander was roused. He

listened carefully to their story of Captain Montjuit's message and the conversation they had overheard between the German general and his engineer officer at Tongres.

"This is important news," he exclaimed. "The Germans must mean those eight army corps at Aix for our left flank. We can't lose time in getting it to Brussels. We must march at once."

Five minutes later the sleeping troopers in the village were routed from their beds by the stirring bugles, and within a quarter of an hour the squadron was riding at a rapid trot toward Diest and a telegraph-line over which the warning could be flashed to the Government at Brussels that the German tidal-wave was ready to roll on over Belgium, the dam at Liège having been burst.

Jack and Raoul remembered nothing of this last part of their midnight ride, however. They slept like logs in an ambulance, and in one behind them surgeons worked over Captain Montjuit, trying to get him into shape to tell his story in the morning to the general at Diest. But General Leman's gallant young adjutant was a sad wreck of the splendid soldier he had been, his nerves shattered, his physique broken down by terrible privations, mental stress and fatigue, and

all night long, as he lay in the ambulance, he babbled meaningless phrases, never once regaining a lucidity such as he secured in the brief interval in which he gave his message to Jack and Raoul.

For this reason, it fell to the lot of the boys to tell the story alone to the gruff general who had scowled at them as they started out upon their quest. He heard them through without a word.

"You have done well," was all he said when they finished. But such comment from him, they felt, was equivalent to the wildest praise.

That afternoon, August 17th, the world was electrified by the intelligence that the Queen of Belgium and most of the Ministers of the Cabinet had left Brussels, and that the capital of the Kingdom had been transferred to Antwerp, although the King, the Minister of War and one or two other prominent members of the Government remained with the headquarters of the army in the field. The news brought by Jack and Raoul was responsible for this. Once Liège had fallen, the Belgians knew their capital was doomed. All they could hope to do was to retire fighting as the Germans advanced, and because of the last-minute advice of the prepara-

tions for the final invasion, King Albert and his generals were able to perceive the German strategy to launch the corps concentrated at Aix against the Belgian left wing in an effort to push it away from Antwerp and force it out into the open country, where it could be demolished by superior forces. To counteract this move, the Belgians prolonged their left through Diest to the Dutch frontier, a precaution which effectually prevented them from being flanked, and made all preparations to retreat when the pressure became too great for them to resist.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIGHT FOR BRUSSELS

Lying in the emergency hospital at Diest the next day, Captain Montjuit was able at last to tell his story of the fall of Liège to a little group, which included the two boys as well as the general commanding and his staff. And there was not a single man present who did not thrill at the heroism that breathed in every word of his brief narrative.

"The Germans brought up their heavy artillery after they breached the circle of fortresses," he said, speaking slowly and painfully. "On August 11 they began the bombardment with four and six-inch guns, concentrating their efforts particularly on Fort Loncin, which General Leman had made his headquarters. But these guns had little effect on us, so the next day they brought up eight-inch howitzers, and hammered us again for three days, still without causing any vital damage. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon of the 15th that we noted a new detonation

in the firing, the voice of the 16½-inch mortars. These guns fired shells a ton in weight and they crumbled the forts to pieces. When they struck they tore blocks of concrete as large as houses from the ramparts and overturned steel cupolas as easily as if they were soap-bubbles. The fumes choked and suffocated us. We realized the end had come, and in this moment my chief called me and begged me to make a desperate effort to pass through the besieging lines and tell the King that we had done our best. That is all I remember."

On the way back to Headquarters from this interview, the general asked the boys whether they wished to be sent back to Brussels.

"We should rather stay, sir, if it is permitted," said Raoul, after a hasty glance at Jack. "Can't we help some way?"

"Help? Anybody can help," roared the general in his threatening voice. "I'm sent out here with a handful of men to hold back 50,000. I'd use the Sisters from the Convent if they weren't working in the Hospital already. I will send you to Tirlemont to join the troops there as dispatch-bearers."

The well-organized Belgian transport-service whisked the boys across-country to Tirlemont in

a swift motor-car inside of an hour—for in the modern game of war, it must be remembered, space has been annihilated by the automobile and the aëroplane. Distances that two hundred years ago, over muddy roads, would have required a week to traverse are now negotiated in a couple of hours.

Tirlemont was held in some force as an advance-post to protect Louvain. Besides several squadrons of the Guides, there were two or three regiments of infantry in the vicinity, two field-batteries and a whole division of cavalry.

When the boys arrived they found the infantry and field artillery in the act of withdrawing toward Louvain, the operation being covered by the mounted troops, who had cast a wide screen from St. Trond to Jodoigne. The German cavalry, pushing ahead with their usual vigor, were already in close contact with the Belgians at several points, and the boys were told, as usual, that the Belgian commander was on the firing-line, actively supervising his men.

A staff-officer to whom they showed their dispatches, however, volunteered to guide them to the general's temporary headquarters, and presently they were clattering off through the cobbled streets of the town, between thick-set, empty

villages and into country-lanes, across which echoed the clamor of artillery and the crackling, murderous din of machine-guns. There is no more ugly-sounding weapon than a machine-gun; it spits like a cat. Jack and Raoul thought so, you may be sure, as they cantered after their guide, watching the long lines of dismounted troopers, firing from behind houses, fences and hay-ricks; the bunches of horses guarded in hollows; and the fleecy smoke-puffs sailing by overhead which were the death-dealing shrapnel shells, cylinders of cold steel that burst at the required range and showered down on the troops beneath a hail of round bullets which spread out in a cone-shaped hail of destruction.

The cavalry commander was ensconced in a ravine shrouded in bushes, through which he was observing the field of battle with the aid of a telescope mounted on a tripod. A knot of officers and orderlies stood about him, and in an inn-yard a short distance in the rear were their horses, a motor-car and a couple of bicycles. Despite the fact that bullets and shells were skittering through the woods and houses a few hundred yards on either side, the general and his assistants were absolutely cool.

He accepted the dispatches the boys handed

him with a slight nod of thanks, and then skimmed the documents carefully.

"It seems the news of the enemy's advance is confirmed by aëroplane reconnaissance," he said, looking up. "We are ordered to be careful not to engage too closely, and to prepare to follow the infantry back to Louvain not later than to-morrow. I must get this word to my brigade commanders."

Several aides saluted and sought their horses. The general glanced at the boys.

"You may sit down, young gentlemen," he said courteously—he was not at all like the ferocious general they had met at Diest. "I shall be glad to avail myself of your services presently."

The boys did as they were bid. Up to this time the fighting had not been very interesting, but now all of a sudden the Germans seemed to wake up and poured a stream of artillery fire onto a position on the Belgians' right wing over toward Jodoigne. The bursting shells came so fast that sometimes five or six would fall in a single clump, as it were; and it seemed to the boys that nothing could live under such a fire. But when a swarm of Uhlans burst from a line of woods several miles off and swept down upon the bombarded position they were met by a storm

of lead at close range that bowled men out of their saddles by the dozen and sent them tearing back to cover helter-skelter.

"Well done," muttered the general to himself. "Now, if those troops will follow up and seize those woods we shall have—— Here!" he called to the boys.

They saluted.

"Ride over to the commander of that regiment and tell him I wish him to push forward and seize the woods into which the Germans have retreated. Be careful not to expose yourselves. I have lost too many young officers already."

The hearts of the boys were thumping with satisfaction as they rode away, for this was the first time they had been called officers.

They reached the regiment they were seeking without mishap, gave their orders to the commanding officer, and then had the satisfaction of witnessing a pretty charge, pressed home as only the Belgians could press it. Employing every bit of cover, trickling forward in twos and threes at a time, always maintaining a heavy and carefully aimed fire, the Belgians dashed across the fields, carrying their machine-guns with them, and forced the crippled German regiment out of the woods it held, thus gaining a position in the cen-

ter of the German line. Other Belgian regiments were quick to perceive the advantage, reserves were ordered up, including an infantry battalion which had been kept for just such an opportunity, and presently the Germans were in full retreat, having fallen back barely in time to prevent their line from being hacked in two.

That night the boys found themselves with a squadron of lancers on the extreme right wing, to which they had carried orders from the general, apprising the major commanding of the result of the day's fighting and the program for the morrow.

"If I were you, I should stay with us to-night," said this officer, a jovial fellow named Cinquemars. "Of course, we are supposed to hold the line from here to Tirlemont, but you can never tell what will happen in the darkness, and the Uhlans are always up to tricks. Besides, it's by no means impossible we shall have some entertainment here to-night. Being on the extreme wing, you know, we are marks for the enemy's enterprise."

The boys elected to stay and joined the major and his officers in a frugal supper from their haversacks which was served in a big country-house, the Château Orsigny, standing in a patch

of woodland, above a village on the side of a low hill. Across the valley loomed another hill, and here the German pickets were supposed to be holding their ground; but in the quietness that had fallen precipitately with the breaking-off of the fighting, the last thing one would have supposed was that there were hostile soldiers so close at hand.

"Why don't you have any lamps?" queried Jack as they sat down to the meal by such light as found a way through the high windows.

The major laughed.

"That would never do," he answered. "We should be having shrapnel or common shell dropping about our ears, in no time—and if the Germans did not use us as an artillery target, they would probably take advantage of knowing our exact position to make a night attack. As it is, you see, they don't know just where we are. They may suppose that we hold the village and the château here, as we do, but they don't know it. And they aren't likely to take any chances in the circumstances."

Jack went on eating his dinner without making any reply. He was thinking.

"It seems to me, sir," he said finally, "that

you've got a good chance to lay a trap for the Germans."

"How do you mean?" returned the major.

"Why, if you did light up the village and the château and left a few men to make a lot of noise, wouldn't the Germans be tempted to come over and try to wipe you out?"

"I suppose so," admitted Cinquemars.

"And then all you would have to do," continued Jack, "would be to have your men off to one side, in the fields somewhere near the village, say, and come in behind the Germans when they attacked. You ought to be able to gobble them all up, if they should do that."

The major laid down his knife and fork and regarded the American lad with unmixed admiration.

"Have we Napoleon, himself, with us?" he demanded of the table. "My young friend, that's an idea in a thousand. We'll put it into effect at once."

He dispatched orders to the portion of the squadron lying in the village to light every lamp available and kindle some bonfires in the streets, while the château was ransacked from cellar to garret for means to illuminate it like a Punch-and-Judy show. A few minutes later Cinquemars

and his officers stood on the terrace and viewed their handiwork with admiration.

"All the same," commented the major, with a glance at the dim profile of the opposite hillock crowned by the watchful Germans, "I'm not going to take a chance on which of the two alternatives the enemy adopts. He might take it into his head to shell us, instead of falling into Napoleon, Junior's, trap."

Very quietly the men of the squadron, with their horses, were collected in the Park of the château some distance from the building, and then led down into the fields near the village. A few men were left in the village to feed the fires and make all the noise their lungs would permit. Having done this much the Belgians waited, expecting each moment to hear the detonations of the Krupp guns and the whistle of shells. But minute after minute passed and not a shot was fired. A quarter of an hour became half an hour, and Major Cinquemars patted Jack on the shoulder.

"Your trick has worked, lad," he said. "I really believe it has."

But it was more than an hour after this when one of the pickets stationed down in the valley slipped up to inform the commander that he had

heard strange noises on the opposite hillside, the slipping of horses' hoofs and muffled voices. Other sentries came in with the same story, and Cinquemars gave orders for all the men to stand by their horses' heads, ready to nip the nostrils of any beast that attempted to neigh when it sensed the approach of the Germans.

As the enemy advanced across the valley, the Belgian outposts quietly retreated before them, and the men in the village, still shouting and singing as though they had been raiding the champagne cellars of the château, sought shelter in the outskirts where they would be safe from the impending shock. And now any man with sharp ears could hear the dull padding of hundreds of hoofs on the metaled roads.

"They're clever fellows," murmured the major in Jack's ear. "They've muffled their horses' hoofs in straw or blankets. But any sound carries far on a night like this."

A curb-chain tinkled, a saber-scabbard clashed. The Belgian troopers were shifting uneasily, restive for the signal to mount. Then, without any warning, the Germans charged, bugles clanging, men shouting hoarsely, straight into the main street of the village. Cinquemars drew his saber.

"Mount!" he shouted.

Like one man the squadron of lancers flung themselves into the saddle.

It was not necessary to give a second order. In solid column, they pounded off at his heels, around the Germans' flank, into their rear, and then stormed up the village street, lances dipping and falling, sabers slashing right and left. Most of the Germans were cornered out on the road, but a few gained the houses and attempted to put up a game resistance, all without avail. The lancers shot those who refused to surrender, and disarmed the rest. Of the German squadron not a man escaped. They were wiped out, and the chief problem on Cinquemars's mind was what to do with a number of prisoners actually exceeding his effectives.

Luckily for him, an armored motor-car reached his position after midnight, with orders for him to abandon his post and fall back toward Louvain. Jack and Raoul, who departed with the officers in the car, carried with them an abiding impression of a line of drooping gray figures, the German prisoners, starting on the weary march between files of Belgian lancers.

"Pretty tough luck for those fellows," said Jack.

"After all, they won't be put to work on a rail-

road embankment as we were," replied Raoul philosophically. "They might be worse off. I daresay they'll get enough to eat and some shelter, and for the rest of the war they'll be safe from bullets, at least."

The following day, August 19th, witnessed the development of the action which was called, for lack of a better name, the battle of Louvain. The Belgians were still engaged in withdrawing their troops from Brussels and the right wing behind the Dyle River, where strong defensive works had been prepared; and so that this movement might not be hindered by a swift cavalry attack, it was necessary for a body of some 20,000 men to make a demonstration before Louvain, with the object of holding off the German advance.

The Belgian troops assigned to this task made a very creditable job of it. Here, as elsewhere along the line of outposts that were retiring slowly, with their faces toward the onrushing, ponderous masses of the enemy, the superior mobility and daring of the Belgians imposed upon the Germans a restraint which would never have been permitted had the invaders known how scanty were the forces opposing them.

The cavalry, with whom Jack and Raoul had been serving, were forced out of Tirlemont early

on the morning of the 19th and took up another position with the covering force of infantry just outside of Louvain. By dint of using all the available cover, and constantly marching and countermarching his troops from point to point, the Belgian commander actually made the Germans believe for some hours that they were confronted by the entire Belgian field army. But when the Belgians appreciated the enormous force that was rolling down upon them, with the irresistible weight of a landslide, they decided that they were fooling with disaster and made haste to abandon their positions as rapidly as discipline permitted.

Had it not been for the remarkable raid which Jack and Raoul and a squad of Belgian officers succeeded in making in one of the armored automobiles attached to Headquarters, the peril might not have been learned in time, and in that case the dauntless little army would have been scooped up and crushed between the vast tentacles which were reaching out for it.

The boys were casting about for something to do, after their return from Château Orsigny, when one of the general's staff officers approached them.

"Would you like to try a new sensation?" he asked.

Jack and Raoul bounded to their feet with an eagerness that spoke louder than words.

"All right," laughed the officer. "Come on. A couple of us are going raiding in an armored auto, and there's just room for two little chaps like you. Climb in."

The automobile,—a long, wicked-looking machine, boxed in gray-painted steel, with a turret mounted on the tonneau containing a machine-gun—was waiting at the door. In five minutes, the chauffeur was driving out past the left flank of the Belgian position, following a road which took them in the general direction of the German advance, but outside the immediate zone of hostilities. The motor was a powerful one and the car ate up the ground. They passed the last of the Belgian outposts, and ran along a vacant stretch of road littered with empty shells, discarded knapsacks and all the débris of a battle.

Ten miles farther on, a squadron of Uhlans capered into view, and assailed the car with horrid yells; but when it bore down upon them unswervingly and its machine-gun began to speak with a gruff "brr-rr-r," they took to the fields. The automobile swung to the left here, and made

for a hill which loomed in the middle distance.

"From that hill," explained the staff-officer, who was in command, "we shall have a first-rate view of all the roads from the frontier between Aix and Liège. That is what we are particularly after."

They sighted several German patrols in the distance, and once a dusty column of gray infantry toiled along a cross-road just as they passed, but the footmen paid no attention to the car, evidently taking it for one of their own machines. They gained the hill without any mishap, and climbed slowly to the top. Before them was spread out a wide stretch of level land running almost to the frontier. In time of peace it was dotted with villages and factory-chimneys.

Now, even the army officers gasped at the terrible splendor of the spectacle that was unfolded before their eyes. It looked as if all Belgium was running rivers of steel. Along every road, lane, and cross-road flowed hedges of bayonets or lance-tips, and in between them trundled endless lines of artillery and transport wagons. From north to south, and as far as the horizon line, the country fairly crawled with men, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of men; and the dust-

clouds that banked the rear spoke of additional hundreds of thousands pouring up behind.

"I would not have believed it possible," said the staff officer in awe. "Fancy the human power that moved such a mass! It is too great for men to be trusted with."

The boys could only nod their heads dumbly. The sight was too big for the mind to grasp, too awful, too horribly splendid and ruthless. All at once they felt how tiny Belgium was, and how enormous the might of the German Empire.

The Belgians tore themselves from the spectacle with difficulty.

"We must lose no time if we are to have any chance of escaping," said the officer. "Those Uhlans will have heliographed our dash all along the line, and we must try a new road to return by."

"How can they stop you?" asked Raoul, as the car turned and ran down the hill.

"Oh, it's not so difficult," the Belgian replied. "I only hope you do not get an object-lesson. The favorite way is to cover the roads with tacks or glass or to dig a ditch. They also stretch wires or cables to trip us, but we carry steel knives in front of the radiator and the top, so that we can slash through such obstacles."

At the foot of the hill the car turned into a lane that ran toward the Dutch frontier, turned again and followed a network of back-tracks in an industrial neighborhood, well off the main routes of travel. Once, as they flashed through a dingy village, a patrol of German infantry dashed out at them; but the car was past before anything could be done to stop it. The real danger came when they turned to the west and made direct for Louvain, across a country liberally sprinkled with Uhlans and infantry-posts. As they ripped through the first village, the boys caught a glimpse of an impromptu wire entanglement constructed across the road, but they were scarcely conscious of passing through it. A slight jar, and the wire hung in shreds.

Then a field battery on a distant hillock strove desperately to gauge their speed and explode a shell near enough to knock them over. But the chauffeur fooled the gunners by switching into a side-road which hid them from view. They were within ten miles of their goal, when they encountered the most serious obstacle, a determined fire which was opened upon them from a village while they were still a long gunshot away. Bullets rattled against the armored sides of the car, but nobody paid any attention to the attack, until the

chauffeur pointed to a gap in the road in front of them.

"Take to the fields," ordered the officer in command, after a single glance ahead. To their right was a meadow, fenced in with low timber, and the big car scrambled up the slight bank, broke through the fence and skidded over the sod at scarcely diminished speed. In the road they had just left yawned a gaping hole, plenty deep enough to have ditched them. But the chauffeur skillfully ran his car through the field, picked out an easy point to descend to the road again, and was on his way without an instant's stop.

"Bully!" cried Jack. "This man is some driver!"

"You're right," agreed the staff officer. "He is a racing driver in civil life. A little thing like that doesn't bother him."

By this time, one of the other officers had the machine-gun drumming a path for them through the village, and they sputtered out of the trap with nothing worse than a punctured tire, which reduced their speed, but not sufficiently to handicap them against pursuit by cavalry. Spitting fire at everything that looked at all like a barrier, they dashed up the long road, crossed the

outermost line of German outposts, and slowed at last to give the Belgian countersign, safe in the protection of the batteries that guarded Louvain.

CHAPTER X

WITH DISPATCHES TO NAMUR

There was no rest for anybody in those days of rushing, world-shaking events. Back in safety once more, Jack and Raoul found telegraphic orders awaiting them to proceed to Brussels and report for duty. Haste was emphasized as a desirable virtue, and they responded to the hint like the good soldiers they had become. Training of the kind they had gone through brings out the latent strength in a boy's character. It makes him older, more self-confident, and at the same time more obedient. Discipline really means ability to obey orders, not to give them; before any man is fit to command other men, he must have learned how to do what he expects of those under him.

At the gloomy War Ministry in Brussels, surrounded by excited, swirling crowds, all seeking a way of escape from the onrushing German hordes, they were met by plump little Baron de Quezonc. Through the open windows could be

heard faintly the far-off booming of the cannon around Louvain; on the sidewalks the people stood in groups reading the scanty news in the papers that were still issued, debating means of getting to Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, or Ostend, anywhere out of reach of the invaders. Of course, many thousands of citizens had departed in the past week, but the imminence of the foe had brought home to the mass of the city's population, as never before, the possibility of their surrender to Germany.

The fact that the capital was to be abandoned had not yet been made known to the people. It was not until late that afternoon that the Civil Guard were marched from their posts on the barricades and loaded on trains for Ghent; not until evening that the dread word was passed from lip to lip that the unthinkable was about to come to pass—that Brussels must be abandoned to her fate without any defense, this step having been taken by the King and his generals to save the city from the bombardment which must inevitably have wrecked it had the Germans been resisted at the gates.

Jack and Raoul first heard the news, themselves, from the lips of de Quezonc.

"Yes," he said, with a bitter look on his usu-

ally pleasant face, "it's only too true, lads. Brussels is not fortified, and the news you have obtained of the enemy's plans and numbers was the deciding factor with the General Staff. Why lock up the Field Army in this city where it would cease to be a field army? they argued. What good would it do? The Germans might be delayed, but in the long run they would surely smash the city to pieces and capture it. As it is, we shall keep our Field Army intact, and be a constant thorn in the enemy's flank when he marches on to invade France. I leave here for Termonde to-night, and hereafter Headquarters will be situated there. As for you two, I have another job for you, one after your own hearts, I believe."

He picked up a heavy document from the table.

"This is a personal letter from the King to the Commandant of the fortress of Namur, which will probably be attacked by a German column within the next twenty-four hours. It is vital to the success of the plans we have laid in conjunction with our Allies, France and England, that Namur should be defended for at least ten days. The longer it holds out, the better. The French Army is mobilizing rapidly; the English Army will be at Mons and Charleroi to-morrow. With a fortnight's delay to their advantage they will be

able to meet the Germans on Belgian soil, with equal numbers and hurl them back. But Namur must hold out. Do you understand? You are to present this communication to the Commandant, and with it, you are to deliver this verbal message —he *must* hold out. Otherwise, our whole plan of campaign will be deranged, and we shall have to begin all over again.''

The boys saluted, and Jack took the dispatch and stowed it away in his jacket.

''Any orders as to route, sir?'' he asked.

''You will take the railway to Gembloux,'' replied the Baron. ''Here is a requisition for two motor-cycles. Carry them with you on the cars, and use them in getting from Gembloux to Namur. Are you armed? That is well. The Uhlans are everywhere through that country. Of course, you are to destroy the King's letter if there is danger of being captured. Good-by—and good luck!''

When the boys had secured their motor-cycles from the much-depleted military-equipment department, they trundled them to the railway station. Upon exhibiting their special passes, the station-master appeared, and they explained to him that they were dispatch-bearers and wanted to take the first train to Gembloux.

"I am very sorry," he said. "But I have just received a message stating that the enemy has gotten across the line a short distance this side of Gembloux and service is abandoned."

"What are we to do, then?" demanded Jack. "We are King's messengers. It is important that we get through."

"There will be no more regular trains to the south," said the station-master. "It is too unsafe all along the line to venture the rolling-stock. All cars and locomotives are being drawn off to Antwerp and Ghent as rapidly as possible. But so far the line to Nivelles is undamaged, and what I might do is to hitch a car to a locomotive and send you through that way if I can find an engineer foolish enough to drive you."

The boys consented to this suggestion, and the station-master disappeared in search of an engine-driver. He returned presently with a sturdy, thick-set young man in overalls.

"This is Jacqueard," announced the station-master. "He and his fireman are willing to drive you. Come, I am having an express-locomotive and a second-class truck coupled up, now. The line is clear and you will be able to pull out in ten minutes."

The boys loaded their motor-cycles on the truck,

and then looked over the locomotive, which seemed small to Jack's American eyes, although he knew that in regular service it was used to haul the through trains to Paris. But speed, as it turned out, was no requirement in the kind of run they had ahead of them. The line was unpatrolled, and Jacqueard dared not drive fast lest Uhlans might have torn up the track. Jack and Raoul rode in the truck, with carbines across their knees, watching the country for signs of raiders. But apparently war had not yet blasted this stretch of Belgium. Such people as they saw were farmers and their families, patiently at work, unwitting the dreadful storm which was to burst over them a few days later.

In the middle of the afternoon the train rumbled into Nivelles, which was held by French cuirassiers. An officer at the station told the boys that some of his men had been as far as Fleurus on the branch-line which ran on to Namur, and they persuaded Jacqueard to continue along this track. The country they passed through now was terribly desolated, not the least like the untouched region they had traversed between Brussels and Nivelles. True, as yet the actual hand of war had not scorched it. But the villages and farmhouses were deserted, and little squads of French

troopers were the sole occupants of the roads. One of these squads fired on the train, and Jacqueard applied the emergency brakes so promptly that the boys were thrown in a bruised huddle in a corner of the car.

Twilight had fallen when they pulled into Fleurus, and here again they found French cavalry pickets in control. These men reported the Germans to be coming up in great force, and declared that they expected to be driven out the next day at the latest, possibly that very night.

"The Uhlans have been across your road all day," asserted an officer they talked with. "It is madness for you to try to get through. Namur is all but surrounded, and to-morrow the siege will begin in earnest."

He tried to dissuade them from attempting to continue their journey, but Jack and Raoul decided that they would go on a couple of hours before dawn. In the meantime, they could get a meal at the officers' mess in a local inn and a bit of a nap. It was just short of three o'clock, with the stars pricking out in a velvet summer sky, when an orderly roused the boys from their hard beds on mattresses on the floor of the inn dining-room. He had steaming mugs of coffee ready for them, and the officer of the guard, who

lounged in the temporary "office" improvised in the reception-room across the hall, came out to see that they had a sufficient supply of gasolene and bid them good-by. He sent a mounted sergeant with them as far as the outposts, and then the boys found themselves alone once more, the white ribbon of the road ahead, and not a friend to rely upon clear up to the gates of Namur.

They rode moderately fast, fast enough to make themselves poor marks for casual sharp-shooters, slow enough to be able to keep an eye on the roadside. Raoul rode ahead, with Jack close behind him. Each had an automatic pistol strapped to his belt and a carbine resting in a sling along the cross-bar under him, where it could be found at an instant's warning. Needless to say, they had no lights, although each was provided with an electric lantern for emergency use. This emergency was not long in coming. They had ridden in silence for some miles, when Raoul suddenly put on his brakes and signaled for a halt.

"What's wrong?" queried Jack, sliding up beside his chum.

Raoul's answer was to flash his lantern down at the surface of the road, ground dusty by heavy traffic and scant rain. It was scarred and trampled by a multitude of horses' hoofs.

"Well, what of it?" said Jack. "The Frenchmen were along here, they said."

"Yes, but did you happen to notice the way the nails in the shoes on the French horses were clinched back?" returned Raoul. "These nails are not clinched back."

Jack nodded. It was true.

"Score for you, Raoul," he admitted. "And these fellows were crossing the road toward Charleroi—so we'll have 'em on our right hand. There are sure to be others to the left of the road, which means we're surrounded."

"And I'd be willing to bet those horses went by within an hour," added Raoul.

"The point is, they'll be back soon," Jack went on thoughtfully. "This force wasn't larger than a squadron. They wouldn't dare to remain near Charleroi after dawn. They're simply reconnoitering. Now, where will they recross—about here or farther along the road toward Namur?"

"Farther on," decided Raoul. "Don't you see? They'll be casting a semi-circle before Charleroi. They'll ride from here straight toward the Allies' outposts, then circle toward the east and finally turn back north again."

"That means an extra-tough job in front of us," commented Jack. "We'd better be going."

They shot off this time regardless of their surroundings, letting out the powerful little motors of their machines to the utmost that was in them. The eastern sky was already lightening, as they bore down upon the dark bulk of a village similar to many others they had visited by day and by night in the past two weeks. It was slightly larger than usual, and off to one side a brace of towering chimneys and a maze of pit machinery bespoke a coal-mine. But the boys paid little attention to its appearance. They were bending over their handle-bars, roaring along at fifty miles an hour.

"Cr-rrack!"

Jack looked at Raoul; Raoul looked at Jack. Both looked at their tires. But it was not a puncture.

"Cr-rrack!" again. "Crack! Crack! Crack!"

A whining noise by his ear illuminated Jack's mind. They were being shot at. He glanced over to the right, and in the shadows of the buildings around the mine shaft he dimly descried a group of men. Other groups were running out of buildings to the left of them. Just ahead a file of gray-uniformed infantry ran into the middle of the road and kneeled down to fire. But it was disconcerting work shooting at charging motor-

cycles, and the shots went wild, while the Germans leaped out of the path of the machines barely in time to escape disaster.

As they came to a cross-road, a new note was mingled with the uproar in their wake—the thundering of hoofs. Lances lowered, heads down, horses racing madly, a squadron of Uhlans were sweeping up this side-road, aiming to cut them off by interposing a mass of brute and human flesh through which they could not plow a way. It was a nip and tuck race. Let the leading files of horsemen but reach the road, and the boys knew it would be impossible for them to get past, no matter how frightened the horses might become. The merest shock would serve to disturb the delicate balance of the motor-cycles. Their plight was desperate.

It was Jack, swift-thinking, who solved it. He snatched at his pistol, and fired slowly at the charging column of lancers. Even at the speed at which he was traveling it was impossible to miss that dense mass. Horse or rider, it mattered not which he brought down. And as his first shots took effect there was a noticeable check in the Uhlans' pace. A couple of chargers in their death-throes rolled over in the path of the squads behind, other horses tripped and fell in the nar-

row way, and confusion reigned. In the moment of advantage gained, the boys got by, and two minutes later were a mile and a half away.

But their troubles were not over yet. Behind them sounded another, more sinister "View Halloo," the raucous bellow of an automobile siren, signaling for the right of way. Jack slowed to get out of the dust-cloud they had been stirring, and glanced back. Exactly as he had feared, a big armored car, of the type the Germans sent with all their raiding parties, was emerging from the village at sixty miles an hour.

"For your life, now," he shouted to Raoul. "No time to lose."

They opened their throttles wide, and the machines fairly skimmed the dust, the splutter of their own motors drowning out the crackle of the machine-gun on the armored car, which they knew was firing at them because of the spurts of dust kicked up by the bullets that missed. It was still the twilight of the dawn, but the east grew ruddier with every minute, and the boys knew the aim of the German gunners must improve gradually. Moreover the car was faster than their machines; it was beginning to overhaul them slowly but certainly.

Jack looked around him in desperation. They

had come into a sparsely settled tract of country, with patches of woodland dotted at intervals along the road. Just short of one of these patches the road swerved to the right, crossing under a railroad trestle, and then turned sharply again toward Namur. As they rounded this S turn, Jack shouted to Raoul and braked his machine to a halt. He seized his carbine and sprang clear, allowing the motor-cycle to fall in the middle of the road.

"Come on," he shouted. And without stopping to think, Raoul followed suit. They sought shelter in a clump of underbrush, and waited. The snarling of the powerful motor of the German car was clear in their ears, and in a jiffy it swept around the curve, crashed over the motor-cycles and jarred to a halt. Plainly, the Germans were at a loss. They looked from the abandoned wrecks of the motor-cycles to the bushes along the road, still indistinct in the dusk, and consulted nervously. There were only two officers in the car besides the driver, and they did not fancy stalking Belgians in the open.

While they talked, Jack and Raoul crept from the bushes behind them. The armored shutters closing the rear of the car had been lowered to let in the air, and the boys had an uninterrupted view

of their two foes crouched on either side of the machine-gun which poked its nose from the demi-turret that over-hung the driver's seat.

"One, two," counted Jack, and they fired, at the same instant dashing forward with a wild yell of exultation. They dropped their carbines, and swarmed into the tonneau of the car with their pistols ready; but the two officers were helpless, one shot through the thigh and the other insensible from a glancing wound on the skull. As for the driver, a stolid private, he was bewildered by the removal of the only brains he knew, and he meekly surrendered his seat to Raoul and obeyed Jack's instructions to lift the wounded officers to the ground. Within two minutes after the fight began the car was under way again, and Jack had turned the machine-gun on its swivel so that it was trained back along the road ready to use against any additional pursuit that might develop.

Their adventures were ended for the time being, however. The remainder of the run to Namur was without incident; and they entered the city, passing between Fort Saurlée and the railroad, early in the morning. What struck both of them was the absence of any of the bustle and preparation that might be expected in a town which was

under an hourly threat of bombardment. No troops were visible in the outskirts of the fortified positions on the left bank of the Sambre, where the main attack of the Germans was sure to come. Such troops as they did see were dispirited, and no field-works, supplementary to the permanent fortifications, had been constructed.

"Where is the Commandant's Headquarters?" Raoul asked the patrol who inspected their passes under the hill which is surmounted by the batteries of Saurlée.

"You'll find him at the Hotel de Ville, I fancy," returned the man apathetically. "He's there most of the time."

The boys exchanged a significant glance. They, who had witnessed the tireless activity and resourcefulness of General Leman at Liège, realized only too well how hopeless must be any defense which was so lacking in spirit and dash. But they held their peace and drove on to the center of the city, arriving at the Town Hall just as the general's staff were sitting down to breakfast. He, himself, was at first too busy to receive them, but when Raoul explained to a smart young aide that they carried a letter from the King, which was to go into the hands of the Commandant, himself, they gained an absurdly

hasty admittance. The general read over the King's letter with casual interest.

"I will do the best I can," he said wearily. "But what chance is there for us if Liège fell so easily? We have fewer guns, and none so heavy. The English and French have not kept their promise to come to our aid, and my troops are disheartened."

Jack repeated the verbal message from the Baron de Quezonc, and then the Commandant dismissed them with a vague promise to send them out of town at the first opportunity with dispatches for the General Staff at Termonde.

Although the boys were tired, they decided to make an inspection of the defenses before they took any rest, and what they saw only served to strengthen their first impressions. What the general had said about his forts and his troops was true. But he had not taken any steps to increase the efficiency of either. Instead of throwing forward his infantry to hold the gaps between the forts and cover the approaches to the positions, in order to delay the Germans as long as possible, he had concentrated practically all of his 26,000 men in the city where they were of no use, thus throwing all the strain of resisting the German

attack upon the artillerymen garrisoning the forts.

"If he would only push his infantry across the Sambre, and try to hold the Germans off from field-intrenchments," lamented Jack. "He could gain a week that way."

That afternoon the Germans attacked the forts lying on the left bank of the Sambre. Their great guns fired unhindered from a range of seven and a half miles, safe from all counter-attack by the guns of the forts. The Belgian infantry rested in its lines, passive and useless. In the streets of the town, such of the population as remained clustered fearfully, listening to the racket of the shells bursting over the forts on the line of hills which encircle the city proper. Nothing was done to hinder the besiegers. Hour by hour more batteries were brought into play against the forts, and the garrisons did their best to reply. But they had no chance. All that night the bombardment was continued, and all the next day, the German gunners gradually working up to a crescendo of fury, in which they poured twenty shells a minute into the forts and those suburbs of the city immediately behind the fortified positions which their guns could reach. On the morning of the

23d of August it was obvious that the fall of the city was a matter of hours.

Jack and Raoul hunted industriously for the Commandant, anxious to get the dispatches he had spoken of and make at least a try for liberty. But he was nowhere to be found, and finally when they learned from several officers that the field troops of the garrison were to attempt to fight their way through to the south, they made up their minds that they would wait no longer. Every hour lessened their chances of getting through. Raoul, in the meantime, had picked up an acquaintance with an officer commanding a cyclist detachment which was to head the sortie, and this officer offered to allow them to ride with his troops in their armored car, which prize they had cannily clung to, foreseeing its possibilities in any attempt to escape.

Late that afternoon the advance-guard started. The Germans had not endeavored as yet to establish an effective blockade of the city—indeed, they had not anticipated any need of doing so, as they had no doubt of their ability to force an entrance within a couple of days. Consequently, the Belgians, fighting in a compact column, like men with their necks in the noose, had little difficulty in smashing through such interference as

was offered to them. The leaders, with Jack and Raoul, fared better than the main body, who were caught up in the vortex of the battle between the French, who were retreating from Charleroi, and the pursuing Germans, and escaped only with a loss of about half their number. The advance guard got clear of this mêlée, and the Scouts, after reaching a point behind the French lines, raced madly across France, in rear of the retreating English army, and finally regained Belgian territory at a point near Courtrai, whence they made their way to Termonde.

CHAPTER XI

THE SACK OF LOUVAIN

"So, you have escaped again!" exclaimed de Quezonc, as the boys entered the improvised headquarters of the General Staff at Termonde. "You lads must bear some magic talisman. I thought this time you were safe on your way to a German prison camp."

"No, sir," retorted Jack, with a laugh. "And, what is more, we have an armored car taken from the enemy and in more or less serviceable condition—it has had hard usage in the last couple of days—to turn over to you."

"Splendid. But now tell me of your trip and of what happened at Namur. All we know is the bare fact that the Germans took it in two days. Now, you see what has happened. It was just as I said. Namur was the key to the plan of campaign our Allies had worked out. The Germans have been able to sweep on unhindered, and they are converging all their strength upon the English troops in an effort to crumple them up and

push the French away from Paris, so that they can drive them into the Alps. We must begin again from the beginning, reconciling ourselves to the fact that the Germans have seized two-thirds of Belgium and most of northern France—all because Namur was unable to do what was expected of it."

He listened to their story of the fall of Namur and a brief description of the escape of the mobile garrison.

"I am glad we saved something from the wreck," he said bitterly, when Jack, as spokesman, had finished his narrative. "Every man counts with us. We are fighting every day. Men and horses are wearing out under the strain, but there is no let-up. There is work for twice as many men as we have."

He got up and walked to a window, staring contemplatively down upon the busy street below, crammed with Belgian infantry bivouacking in the open for want of better quarters.

"There is a service I have in mind for you at once—if you are not too tired to take it up," he continued. "It is most dangerous. So dangerous, indeed, that I hesitate to describe it to you. But you are gallant boys, and you have already given proof of your ability to accomplish certain

things that older men would fail in. What do you say? Have you had enough excitement?"

"No, sir," said Jack.

"No, sir," echoed Raoul.

"Good! Briefly, what we want is this: We are so completely shut in along the stretch of coast from Antwerp to Ostend that we lack detailed information of the Germans' reinforcements and supply routes by which they are feeding their huge armies in France. There is a man in Louvain who has these facts ready for us. You are to get them from him. If you are detected in the work, you will probably be hung as spies. Are you still of a mind to go?"

Both boys nodded.

"In that case, you will do well to start immediately. It will be necessary for you to travel up toward the Dutch frontier. From there you will strike through the German lines toward Louvain. You are to pose as boys who have become separated from your friends and who are returning to your parents there. I shall provide the papers needful for this part. The man you are to find will pass you as his son and nephew. But leave Louvain at your earliest opportunity. If it seems best, return by way of Holland. In any case, remember that in this mission, as in all the

work you have done, haste is most important, second only to success."

From some mysterious source, Baron de Quezonc produced fully stamped legal documents, bearing the German coat-of-arms, signed by the Military Governor of Louvain, describing "Jean Corbeau" and "Maurice Santerre" as two youths who had been given permission to pass through the lines to seek relatives who had become separated from them in the confusion of the war. In addition to these, each of the boys was equipped with a money-belt, liberally packed with gold. The military-transport department of the army carried them to Turnhout near the frontier, and from this point they made their way under escort to the outermost fringe of the Belgian outposts. In the debatable land that still separated the two armies, their Belgian protectors abandoned them, and once more Jack and Raoul were dependent upon their own resources alone, danger encompassing them upon all sides.

They proceeded cautiously along a country road that led in the direction of Moll, which, they had been instructed, was held by the Germans. But long before they reached this town they were stopped by one of the inevitable patrols and made to show their papers.

"We were told by my father to meet him in Holland," explained Raoul to the officer in command. "And my cousin and I went there; it was in the panic just before the Germans entered. But my father and the rest were cut off, and unable to leave. So after that they decided to remain, and at last we received a letter telling us to return, as all was safe."

So simple and straightforward a story, combined with Raoul's youthfulness and earnest demeanor, served to lull any suspicions the officer might have had. He gave the boys a pass, stating that he had examined them and found their story correct, and permitting them to make their way to Louvain as best they could.

That night the boys slept in a farm-house which was still occupied by its owners, and in the morning they resumed their tramp, frequently encountering stray parties and patrols of German soldiers, most of whom, they noticed, seemed to be reservists, men well along in middle age. All of these patrols intercepted them and demanded their papers, but in every case the pass which they had received from the first officer who examined them was adjudged sufficient excuse for their presence.

They tramped into Louvain shortly after noon,

footsore and weary, and sought at once the home of Monsieur X——, the gentleman to whom they had been directed by de Quezonc. His house, they found, was on one of the principal residential streets. Upon knocking, they were admitted by a frightened maid-servant, and after a wait of five minutes were conducted into a reception-room, where Monsieur X—— awaited them. He merely looked at them without speaking, and the boys did not wonder at his caution when they glanced out of the windows and saw the German sentinel standing on the corner, and realized that the whole city was under this rigid martial law.

"We come from one lately at Brussels," said Raoul. "He wishes to know the quotations on pork."

This was the phrase they had been instructed to make use of to identify themselves; and the expression of Monsieur X—— became instantly friendly.

"I confess I had not expected that such young men as yourselves would be sent on this errand," he said. "I have the facts you seek, but I am afraid it will be best for you to wait until to-morrow before starting on your return journey. The Germans are extremely suspicious of us, and if it were learned that you left the same day you

arrived there would be trouble. Personally, I wish you could leave this afternoon. This city is sitting on the edge of a volcano."

"What do you mean?" asked Jack.

"You may have noticed," answered Monsieur X——, "that the troops in the streets are reservists. They are not under good discipline, and their officers are not so efficient as the officers of the first-line troops. They have been severely handled by our soldiers in several engagements they have had along the Dyle, and there is beginning to develop a distinct feeling of animosity toward the townspeople, which is evidenced in many trifling little tyrannies. The Germans are always ready to believe that attacks upon them are made by civilians, and they have shot several citizens on unproved suspicions of their having made threatening gestures toward German soldiers. It is as much as your life is worth to appear in a window above marching troops. Why, they have even seized the bows and arrows and old swords and spears of collections of antique weapons."

Monsieur X—— took them to a small room at the top of his house, where they could be safe from disturbance, and outlined to them the information they were seeking. He had collected,

through various sources, fairly accurate figures showing the numbers of German reinforcements in transit from Aix-la-Chapelle to the front, and with the aid of a map he sketched the roads along which the Germans were moving their supplies, spare ammunition, and heavy guns, mainly by motor-transport. After luncheon he left them, for it was necessary, he said, for him to make a show at attending to his business, the Germans having arbitrarily insisted that the affairs of the city should go on as usual, notwithstanding the entire lack of confidence on all sides.

The boys took advantage of being alone to make themselves comfortable on two cots which Monsieur X—— had caused to be prepared for them. They slept all afternoon, and were awakened about six o'clock by a sound of heavy firing. Running to the window, they stared out toward the west suburbs, whence the sounds came. In the streets there was great excitement. German soldiers ran hither and thither, and a machine-gun was dragged forward to command the approach to the railroad station. All the time the firing drew nearer. Presently the red glare of flames showed over the house-tops in the gathering dusk.

"Our people must have won a great battle," ex-

claimed Jack wonderingly. "The fighting is inside the city now."

Raoul shook his head.

"I don't understand it," he replied. "How could it be?"

At this instant, the door opened and Monsieur X—— burst in, his dress disordered, perspiration rolling down his pallid face.

"I am afraid the worst has happened," he stammered shakily. "The Germans are burning and massacring."

"What?" exclaimed the boys in horror.

"Yes," returned their host. "This morning a detachment was sent out under the command of a Major von Manteuffel to reconnoiter our outposts this side of the Dyle. They were pretty severely handled by all accounts, and chased back to the city limits. In the confusion the German outposts fired on Manteuffel's men, and then claimed that it was some of the inhabitants who had done it. At any rate, they began entering houses and shooting all persons, men and women, whom they suspected of having fired at them. And now they are going through the city setting all the houses on fire, and arresting people right and left."

"But surely their officers will regain control of the men?" said Jack.

"I don't know." Monsieur X—— shook his head gloomily. "They are rather savage. Remember what I told you this afternoon. They have worked themselves up into a fury, and the worst of it is, of course, some of our citizens, realizing that they have no chance, have taken to resistance. This gives the Germans an opportunity to color their vengeance with a pretense of justice, and I fear they will make the most of it."

"What had we best do?" asked Raoul.

"How can I say? There are guards in all the streets. Flight would only focus suspicion upon us. Perhaps——"

A volley rang out on the next block, and they leaned from the window to see what was happening. A riotous band of German soldiers, headed by a sergeant, waving a wine bottle and shouting hoarsely, appeared below. In their midst they had several men, whom they scuffed and kicked, and two frightened women. At the same instant, a shot was fired from the house next door, and one of the Germans collapsed in a heap. Instantly the uproar was redoubled. More soldiers came running from all sides.

"Up there," cried some soldiers, pointing to

the window where Monsieur X—— and the boys stood. "No, it was next door," exclaimed others.

"Fire," shouted the sergeant. "They are all Belgians and pigs. Kill 'em all. That's the best way."

The boys dragged Monsieur X—— to the floor as a ragged volley ripped out and a dozen Mauser bullets whisked through the house walls and shattered the ceiling.

"Into the houses after them," bellowed the sergeant to his men. "You've got them, lads. Drag 'em all out here, and we'll have a shooting party, eh?"

With a chorus of derisive yells the soldiers threw themselves at the doors of the two houses.

"There's no time to lose," said Jack coolly, as the battering of the rifle-butts on the door panels reached their ears. "Those fellows are after blood. We've got to escape—any place would be safer than this."

"Whatever you say," muttered Monsieur X—— frenziedly. "I have my family to think of. I—I am not used to these affairs. I—what shall I do?"

It was plainly to be seen that he was wholly unnerved, so the boys took command.

"First, we must find some way to leave the

building," declared Jack resolutely. "Downstairs——"

The front door crashed in as he spoke.

"We'll have to try the roof," interrupted Raoul. "They'll be all over the house in a minute."

The three ran into the hall, and Monsieur X—— directed them to a closet at the back, where there was a ladder leading to a scuttle in the roof. Already they could hear the feet of the German soldiers tramping on the stairs, and the shrieks and screams of the wife and children of Monsieur X——, who did not know what to make of the intrusion.

"Quick, you go first," ordered Jack, thrusting Monsieur X—— onto the ladder. "Never mind your family; they won't be hurt. The Germans are after men."

The Belgian scrambled up the ladder, opened the scuttle and tumbled out onto the roof.

"Now, you," Jack said to Raoul. "No, I'll come after you. Go ahead."

Reluctantly, Raoul followed Monsieur X——. He was not halfway up when the Germans reached the landing below. Already their leader was stamping on the stairs to the top floor. Jack cast a calculating eye aloft. The closet door was open;

Raoul had not yet reached the roof. If he tried to follow, the Germans would see the open door, hear his ascent, and follow onto the roof. Jack shrugged his shoulders. He did not relish the prospect, but there was only one logical thing to do. It was better for one to be taken than all three.

"Pull the scuttle shut," he hissed up to the bewildered Raoul, who did not understand why his chum waited. And Jack marched calmly out of the closet, shutting its door after him. A Prussian reservist, rounding the landing with his rifle at the "charge," stared at the boy in amazement, and then barked a question at him. Jack shook his head. The German solved the difficulty by grasping his captive by the scruff of the neck and hurtling him downstairs. Jack landed in a heap at the bottom, somewhat bruised, but not visibly annoyed.

"There's no sense in losing my temper," he told himself. "That fellow is aching to use his bayonet. So are his friends. My cue is to do what I'm told, and at the right moment spring it that I'm an American."

He avoided being thrown down any more stairs by the simple expedient of walking rapidly ahead of the German and just out of reach of the glit-

tering bayonet which the man seemed desperately anxious to stick into him. On the ground floor, Madame X—— and her children stood crying. The poor woman looked amazed when only Jack appeared, but he winked at her significantly and said:

"It's all right." She brightened up at once, understanding that her husband had escaped, and pluckily interceded for Jack.

"But what has my nephew done that you should arrest him?" she expostulated to the sergeant in the doorway. "He has not broken any of the regulations."

"Oh, hasn't he?" sneered the sergeant. "He was only seen at a window where a man was firing down at us." Then he turned roughly upon Jack. "Where are the rest of your gang?" he demanded in broken French.

"There's nobody else," Jack replied truthfully enough. "The man who fired was in the next house."

"That's what they said in there," replied the sergeant. "No, my young friend, you'll go before the court-martial with the rest of your kind, and if I know the general's temper you'll get a taste of cold lead by morning."

JACK WAS MARCHED IN THE MIDDLE OF A SQUAD OF SOLDIERS
THROUGH THE STREETS OF LOUVAIN

Madame X—— and her children broke down completely at this brutal statement.

"As for you," continued the sergeant to them, "you'd better be glad that we're not burning any more houses on this block. If you're not quiet, I'll start my men to work."

Even the children appreciated the deadly malignity in the man's voice, and quieted their sobs. The sergeant cast a look of triumph around, and finally swaggered out of the door.

"Bring the prisoner along," he ordered over his shoulder. "We'll take him to the railroad station, where the shooting is to be."

With several other prisoners, some of them half-unconscious from ill-treatment, Jack was marched in the middle of a squad of soldiers through the streets of the ghastly tragedy that had once been the lovely city of Louvain. On all sides rifles cracked in summary executions. On every hand pillars of smoke and flames towered from burning houses, and dense clouds of sparks blew over the roofs and ignited buildings which had been spared or overlooked by the soldiery in their work of destruction.

Prominent among the blazing structures were the great Church of St. Peter and the monumental buildings of the University of Louvain, where

Jack and Raoul's tutor, Monsieur Jemard, had studied, one of the oldest and most noted seats of learning in Europe. Not even the Art Gallery and the Library and Natural History Museum, with their priceless treasures, had been spared.

"How can they do it? How can they do it?" Jack muttered over and over again to himself. He was stunned, appalled by the horror of such ruthless destruction.

Instead of taking him to the railroad station, as they had originally intended, his captors, under orders from an officer they encountered, marched him to the ancient Town Hall of Louvain, a famous and beautiful pile, which the Germans spared by some whim, desiring to preserve it as a trophy to their valor in the Germanized city they designed to build upon the ruins of Belgian Louvain. In the basement of this edifice a summary court-martial had been convened, and here all Belgian prisoners were tried without delay, and, for the most part, found guilty. Jack stood in a long line of prisoners, including several women, and until he was reached not once did the judges vary their decision after hearing briefly the reports of the guards.

"Guilty," they said. "You will be shot at sunrise."

Some of the prisoners cried out or groaned. Others, among them the women, threw their heads back and laughed. Jack resolved to copy these last when his turn came.

"Who are you?" said the President of the court, a sour old reserve major.

"I am an American. My name is Jack Morton," returned the boy.

"An American? What were you doing here?"

"I have been visiting my uncle, Monsieur X——."

"Where is your uncle?"

"I don't know. I lost him in the confusion."

"Umph," said the President of the court gruffly. "What have you to say to this, sergeant?"

"This young man was captured in a house from which we were fired upon, Excellency," answered the sergeant glibly. "There were others there, but they escaped in some way unknown to us. He did not say before that he was an American."

From the change in the expression of the officers of the court, Jack realized that he had made a mistake in not announcing at the time he was captured that he was an American.

"What proof have you got that you are an American?" suddenly asked an officer in English.

"That I understand what you say," replied Jack in the same language.

"Humph," grunted the President again. "That proves nothing. On the contrary, it indicates that you may be one of these accursed Englanders."

The whole court growled at this suggestion.

"But I tell you I am an American," protested Jack. "My father is John Morton of New York. I have only been in Belgium a short while. I came here to study."

The President waved the argument to one side.

"You say you are an American, but you cannot prove it," he declared. "It is much more likely that you are English. What we are sure of is that you either fired upon our troops or else were witness to such an act. That in itself is enough to condemn you. You are sentenced to be shot at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, unless you can bring forward unprejudiced testimony to prove your assertion that you are an American."

"But how can I find an unprejudiced witness in that time?" cried Jack.

"How do I know?" said the President disinterestedly.

"But I am an American," retorted Jack fiercely. "Do you realize what it means, shedding the blood of an American?"

"A young man who gets himself in the position you are in generally deserves his fate," returned the officer shortly. "I have no more time to waste upon you. We must teach these Belgians that they cannot fire upon German soldiers. It does not matter who suffers if that lesson is imprinted upon the popular mind. Next case."

The brutal sergeant who had captured Jack grasped him by the shoulder and jerked him away, and led him to the improvised jail for the condemned in a large building near the railroad station. Here were held those prisoners sentenced to die on the next day; a few, including the Burgomaster and several magistrates and police officials, as well as the Rector of the University, had been shot already.

"There, young high-flyer," said the sergeant, spinning Jack into the circle of prisoners. "Sleep for the night. It's a long way to America and a short way to Heaven."

"Honestly, I believe I hate that man," muttered Jack to himself, as he watched the German disappear.

CHAPTER XII

THE RAID ON VON KLUCK'S CONVOY

The room in which Jack was confined occupied the ground floor of what had once been a factory. It was bare and comfortless, and the prisoners disposed of themselves as best they could on the hard floor. Guards, with fixed bayonets, stood at the several doors and at each window. The light was furnished by occasional oil lanterns hung around the walls, so that the guards might keep an eye on the movements of the inmates. It was close in the room, and Jack made his way to a window on the farther wall away from the railroad station. Here he lay down and tried to sleep, but without much success. Sometimes he dozed, but in between naps he thought of what would happen on the next day—and he was not happy.

An hour or more must have passed, when he was aroused by a sudden noise close at hand.

"Hsst!" The sound came again. Jack looked up. The corner he occupied was in shadow; there were no other prisoners near him.

"Hsst!" The signal was insistent.

This time Jack scrambled to his knees and stared all about him. In the window above he was electrified to see the helmeted head of a German soldier and a finger that beckoned him to approach. He could not understand what it meant; for an instant he thought it must be some trick to warrant his summary execution. But the thought had scarcely taken root in his mind when something familiar about the face under the helmet caught his eye, and he leaped to his feet. The soldier was Raoul!

"Ssh!" cautioned Raoul, leaning through the window. "No noise. Is there anybody watching you?"

Jack glanced swiftly around.

"Not a soul," he answered.

"Then take this and shinny out."

"This" was a soap box about a foot high, which Raoul passed in to the prisoner. Mounting upon it, Jack was enabled to get a good purchase on the sill and swing himself through by a single motion learned in gymnasium. He found himself standing in a dingy alleyway, with nobody in sight save Raoul, fully accoutered in the gray field kit of a German infantryman.

"March ahead of me, and don't say anything,"

ordered Raoul. "Hurry! Before the sergeant of the guard makes his inspection."

With Raoul's bayonet held close to the small of his back, Jack obeyed the whispered directions of his chum and finally arrived in a side street off the Boulevard van Tienan. The only persons they met on their march were other soldiers. No civilians were abroad. The fires in the city still raged, and in certain quarters the work of destruction and massacre seemed to be continued unabated. Louvain smoked and flamed like a gigantic funeral pyre.

"Halt," whispered Raoul in front of a dark, silent house.

He pushed Jack into the doorway and fumbled in his pocket for a key. The door opened to his touch, and they groped into an unlighted hallway. Then Raoul took Jack by the hand and led him along this hall and down a short flight of steps into a room where a lamp burned, with the wick turned low.

"Safe!" gasped the Belgian lad, with a sigh of relief. "Jack, I was afraid you were a goner. Whatever possessed you to let yourself be captured that way?"

"There was no help for it," replied Jack. "If I hadn't, the Germans would have heard me going

up the ladder and gone after us. They would have shot Monsieur X—— sure. Now, what about you?"

"Oh, we got away easy enough. We crossed the roofs to a house well down the block where Monsieur X—— knew the people and they took us in. From a window we saw you marched away. Later Madame X—— came and told us what had happened. Just about this time a man who came in said there was a dead German soldier lying in an alley off that street, and I went out and dragged him in. It wasn't pleasant work, but I needed his uniform and gun. That's all there is to it."

"No, it isn't," retorted Jack. "You've done a pretty plucky thing, Raoul. Now, tell me the rest."

"The rest? There isn't any rest. I just put on the uniform and took the rifle and started out to track you. I loafed around the Hotel de Ville, because a soldier I spoke to told me all the prisoners were being tried there. When you were led out, I followed you. I watched them bring you in here, waited until the sentries were posted, and then shouldered my rifle and marched up that alleyway. I told the sentry at that window that he was relieved, and as soon as his back was turned

I signaled you. He'll be a surprised sentry when he reports to the officer of the guard."

"You're a trump, Raoul," declared Jack. "And what's more you've saved my life. I was to have been shot in the morning."

Raoul whistled softly.

"Then we'd best get out of town as soon as possible. I've arranged for that. I picked up another uniform and rifle from a dead soldier on my way to the Town Hall and stowed the booty here—this house belongs to a friend of Monsieur X——; he gave me the key."

Raoul dived into a corner and produced an outfit similar to his own.

"It may be large for you, but never mind," he said. "The Germans aren't particular about the fit of their clothes."

Jack stripped off his own clothes, now much the worse for wear, and put on the heavy gray uniform.

"Have you a plan of escape?" he asked, as he buckled on the ammunition pouches, canteen, and knapsack.

"Yes," said Raoul. "In back of this house there is a garage. It contains two motor-cycles, saved from the Germans. We are to take them and make a try for the Belgian lines."

The motor-cycles were in fairly good condition, and, with the repair kits and an ample supply of oil and gasolene, the boys had no difficulty in making them ready for use. By this time it was well on toward morning, and they had only a couple of hours of darkness in which to effect their exit from the city.

Both were agreed that it would be foolish to attempt to make a straight dash toward the west and the Belgian lines on the Dyle, only a few miles away. The chances of detection were much more numerous in such a maneuver than if they made a leisurely progress to the southwest, claiming to be dispatch-bearers or scouts and watching for a favorable opportunity to rejoin their friends. From time to time they were challenged, but Raoul always answered in German that they were orderlies, carrying dispatches from the Ober-General to the outposts.

In the hours of rapine and plunder—not even yet ended—discipline had been largely cast aside in Louvain, and consequently the boys found their departure from the city much easier than it would have been under ordinary conditions. When one of the outer sentries demanded a password, besides their identification, Raoul laughed at him and replied:

"Have you been asleep? Password! Who has thought of a password to-night? No, friend, we have all been too busy putting away these Belgian pigs to think of passwords."

And the sentry, a raw reservist, stood meekly aside—which was well for himself, because Jack stood ready to bayonet him if he proved recalcitrant.

In the open country their progress was still easier. Every village had its garrison of Germans, but all were too eager to hear the news of the ravaging of stricken Louvain to care about the identity of whoever told them, so long as the teller wore spiked helmet and hodden gray. The boys always pleaded haste in answer to these requests, however, and Raoul represented them as bound on an important mission. In fact, the sergeant in command of the second village they passed gave them their cue.

"Ah, I suppose you are after von Kluck's convoy," he remarked casually. "They're near Wavre by now, I should say. A great sight. Miles and miles of motor-lorries. Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Not that I know of," replied Raoul. "But we were told to hurry, and the Ober-General is a bad man to disobey."

"Spoken like a German," approved the sergeant. "On with you, lads. Follow this road and you'll catch up with the rear-guard of the convoy by Biex."

The sun had not risen an hour when they saw on the near horizon ahead of them the mighty column of dust which indicated the presence of that most wonderful of all the wonders of modern war —a complete, self-supporting convoy that moved to the panting of innumerable motors. It spread out across the country on half a dozen parallel roads and byways, the heavier trucks and lorries taking the main highways, lines of small vehicles following every route that would give footing for their wheels. The roar of the motors reached the boys from a distance of several miles, and with this roar, a weird, rumbling murmur of thundering wheels, creaking axles, grinding gears, fretting brakes, all the hundred and one noises that were the convoy's voice.

Armored automobiles and squadrons of motorcycle troops guarded the flanks of the convoy and lurked about its rear. The boys were aware of the presence of these guardians, and as soon as the column of dust was in full view they determined to stay where they were, rather than draw up closer and possibly be subjected to an

embarrassing inquisition. So they loafed along, picking up all the information they could.

"The fellows on the firing line in France will cheer to see those trucks," said a soldier they met close to noon. "I'll warrant you."

"Why?" said Raoul.

"Von Kluck is getting hard up for food and spare cartridges," answered the German. "When we captured Namur so easily, he fell on the Englanders like a thunderbolt and all but crushed them. They are as good fighters as liars, though, and so far they have kept out of his grasp. But he has driven them back almost to Paris, and as soon as this convoy catches up with him he will be able to finish them."

When they were out of the village and leisurely bowling along the road Raoul translated this statement to Jack. The American boy listened to it with knitted brows.

"Do you know," he said suddenly, "I'm not sure that this isn't more important news than the figures and facts we got at Louvain? It seems to me the best thing we can do is to get across country to Termonde as soon as possible. Our people could send a column of armored cars and motor-cycle troops around south of Brussels and fall on the convoy just before dawn to-morrow

morning. It would be near Enghien by that time. Think what it would mean if we could cripple von Kluck now. It might make up to the Allies for our failure to hold Namur."

"That's true," agreed Raoul. "We've no time to lose, then."

They struck off to the right, fetching a wide circle around Brussels, repeating to all the Germans who questioned them that they bore dispatches for the outposts near Alost. Indeed, so extensive were the movements of German troops all through this country that the coming and going of two dispatch riders attracted scarcely any attention at all. Usually, they were taken for granted.

Riding fast, the boys reached Terpath about four o'clock. Here they were almost on the line of the outposts, and they carefully dodged the town, where officers would have to be encountered, and, taking a by-path, approached the German sentries at a farmhouse, where a sergeant was in command. Raoul left Jack with the machines, and strolled forward alone to talk with the man.

"Well, sergeant, how goes it?" he asked. "My comrade and I have been sent out from Brussels on special service. The Staff are after some de-

tailed information about the enemy's dispositions at Termonde."

"Dangerous work, young fellow," replied the sergeant. "Do you want some of my men to go with you?"

"No, thanks," said Raoul. "You see, we have our motor-cycles, and if it comes to a pinch, we can make a run for it. I just told you so you could keep a watch out for us, and if we come back with the Belgians on our heels, stand ready to give them a volley."

"We'll watch out for you, never fear," promised the sergeant, never thinking to ask for credentials, so natural was Raoul's manner. "It's been so quiet about here for several days, now, we'd welcome any sort of a disturbance. Good luck to you."

He and his men waved adieu to the two motor-cyclists as they wheeled by and bore away through the thickly settled farm country which stretched before them.

"This is the riskiest part of the trip," commented Jack, as they rode at a slow pace, keeping a watchful eye on every side. "We'll be lucky if some hasty Belgian doesn't pot us. I wish we could get rid of these uniforms."

"No use hoping," Raoul grinned back. "The

luck's been with us so far. We'll have to hope it stays with us now. Just remember that if any one yells or shoots at you, throw up your hands quick and shout who you are."

They droned along for half an hour or more without a sign of a human being. The houses they passed were all wrecked, mere shells of what they had been. The fields were uprooted and torn; the road rutted by artillery and transport-wagon wheels. Then, without any warning, a bullet pinged by overhead, and Raoul's quick eye caught a glimpse of some figures dodging behind a stone building on a hill to their right.

"Off your wheel, quick," he snapped.

And both he and Jack tumbled to the ground with ludicrous haste, and stood in the middle of the road with hands held high over their heads.

No more bullets came their way, but they stood in this uncomfortable position for hours, it seemed, before the Belgians ventured to approach them. Their arms ached when finally a voice hailed them from a hedge a hundred yards up the road.

"What do you want?" called the man behind the hedge, speaking in German.

"We're Belgian spies, with important infor-

mation,'' replied Raoul in French. ''We want to get into the lines as quickly as possible.''

Evidently this sounded like a trap to the Belgians, for no more was said for five minutes.

''Hurry up,'' called Jack impatiently—his arms were aching so he was afraid they would drop at his sides, despite his efforts to the contrary. ''We can't stand here forever.''

''But how do we know that you are not laying a trap for us?'' replied the voice from behind the hedge.

''Use your common sense,'' replied Jack scornfully. ''Can you see anybody else in this vicinity except us two?''

Another hasty conference behind the hedge, and then the Belgian called out:

''Very well, you may come in and surrender. But you must lay down your guns and walk up here with your arms in the air.''

''Anything to get over this agony,'' groaned Jack to Raoul.

And, with their arms still rigidly aloft, they walked stiffly toward the hedge. The instant they stepped behind it half a dozen Belgian infantrymen jumped on them and bore them to the ground. Ropes were produced, and the ''Germans'' were tightly bound. Then they were yanked to their

feet and ordered to march. In the meantime, several of the Belgians had gone out and secured their prisoners' motor-cycles and rifles.

"Where are you taking us now?" demanded Raoul indignantly. "This is ridiculous."

"Have it your own way," returned the leader of the Belgians sententiously. "We are doing our duty. You Germans are always up to tricks. We can't trust you."

"But where are we going?" insisted Jack.

"We are taking you before our officer," replied the Belgian shortly. "He will decide your case."

Just as dusk was falling, the boys were escorted into a little village in the outlying suburbs of Termonde. Their captors marched them down a street and through a gateway into what had formerly been a lumber yard. Here they waited, while the leader of the detachment went inside to make his report. He returned with an officer, who walked over toward the prisoners with a stride that reminded both Jack and Raoul of somebody they had known before.

"Well, what have you to say for yourselves?" he asked.

"Monsieur Jemard!" they exclaimed together.

"Eh? What's that? You know me?"

"Know you?" Raoul laughed weakly. "We are

Raoul Heilleprin and Jack Morton, Monsieur Jemard. Don't you remember us? The boys you used to teach at Liège."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Monsieur Jemard. "Here, get these ropes off the prisoners—they are my friends. Boys, boys, how did this happen?"

He took them inside and plied them with hot coffee and food, and heard as much of their story as they thought they had a right to tell.

"You certainly have had an adventure," he said, when they had finished. "You shall go into Termonde at once. I'll have a car here for you in a jiffy."

While they waited for the car he told them of such fighting as had occurred during the past few days, all of it resulting decidedly to the advantage of the Belgians, who had repulsed the advances of the Germans and even struck back some stinging blows.

At Termonde, the boys met their old friend, Baron de Quezonc, who listened to a few words of their report, and then, in their soiled gray German uniforms, ushered them straight into the presence of the Council of War, which was presided over by King Albert himself. The boys blinked confusedly in the bright lights of the room,

but they told their story simply and without confusion. When they had finished, some of the generals cross-examined them eagerly, but the King sat at the head of the table, never speaking a word, although his eyes dwelt always on their faces.

"It is a remarkable opportunity, your Majesty," said an old general, whose breast sparkled with decorations. "Do you not agree?"

"Certainly." The King waved the question away as settled. "Issue the necessary orders at once. Concentrate all the motor vehicles we have at hand. Two squadrons of motor-cyclists will be sufficient to go with them. There had better be two or three truck loads of explosives as well. But I am much more interested in these young gentlemen, who have been of such signal service to us."

He motioned to the boys to come nearer to him.

"Who are you? Do you serve in the army?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Raoul. "We are members of the Gray Wolf Patrol. We serve as volunteers."

"I wish we had some more like you," said the King. "You have earned my thanks by this deed of yours. Hereafter you may know that I shall

keep my eye upon you. Belgium is proud of her younger sons such as you.''

Jack moved about uncomfortably. He didn't propose to deny his nationality.

''If you please, your Majesty,'' he blurted out, ''I'm not a Belgian.''

''No?'' said the King inquiringly. ''What then?''

''I'm an American, sir. But if I wasn't an American I'd rather be a Belgian.''

The King leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

''That is the best compliment I have ever received,'' he said.

But at this point the Baron de Quezonc intervened.

''It is only right to tell your Majesty,'' he said, ''that our young American ally has seen more service than any of our soldiers. He and his friend have been present at practically every engagement of importance since the siege of Liège.''

The King stood up, and the boys saw that he was a finely made man, looking just as they had always fancied a King would look. He was tall, and he had a face that was at once strong and kind, a little care-worn, too, by the tremendous strain upon him of the war and the disaster and

suffering that threatened his people. But he gave the impression of a man equal to emergencies, a man who would never flinch under punishment.

"What the Baron de Quezonc tells me only serves to confirm my own judgment," he said gravely. "I thank you, young gentlemen, for your services, and I shall look to hear more of you in the future."

He extended his hand and gave each of them a warm clasp.

"Good night," he said simply.

Outside the Headquarters all was orderly confusion. Long columns of armored automobiles were mobilizing, and in the side streets the motor-cycle troops were standing by their machines waiting for the order to mount. The boys soon secured permission to take part in the raid on the score of their familiarity with the roads and the country which would have to be traversed; and a few minutes past midnight the Belgians started, moving in two columns, so as to prevent their lines from stringing out.

They swung out to the southward, struck the German line without any warning, shattered it, and rolled on across country, fighting a continual series of skirmishes with the German garrisons of the villages they passed. It was close on to

dawn when they caught the convoy, just before it was ready to start on its day's journey. There was some brief fighting with the guards, but the Belgians easily overmatched them; and then the work of destruction was begun without any delay. Up and down its cumbersome length, through all its several columns, the convoy was given over to the torch and the bomb. Gasolene tanks were set alight; truckloads of ammunition were started off by shells or hand grenades; masses of trucks were piled together and deluged with oil so that they would burn all the more fiercely.

The flames and smoke towered to the heavens, visible for miles and miles and drawing Germans from all points of the compass like hordes of angry wasps. The motor-cycle troops stood them off as long as they could; then the armored cars took up the fight. But it was only a question of minutes before the Belgians were obliged to face the choice of annihilation or swift retreat. Their work of destruction was not entirely finished, but they had the satisfaction of knowing it was well under way, and that von Kluck's commissariat was irreparably crippled for the next two weeks, at least.

They retired, fighting sullenly, long columns of gray, steel-cased cars, each spitting fire from ma-

chine-guns and rifles; while the rear of each column was covered by a few trucks mounting heavier guns, able to cope with the field artillery that the Germans were bringing up in a desperate effort to smash some of their enemy's cars and block the road. The retreat was not unattended by damage, but the Belgians gave as good knocks as they received, and, carrying their wounded with them, they succeeded in slicing a path through the tightening German net and gained the protection of a large cavalry force which had been thrown forward from Termonde and St. Nicolas to serve as a screen for them.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The Germans were not long in taking revenge for the destruction of von Kluck's convoy, for the damage done to them by this raid was fully as great as Jack and Raoul had anticipated. The impetus of the vast mass of men the German general was throwing against the slender line of the British, forming the right flank of the Allies' army in northern France, was delayed and finally checked for lack of the very ammunition and food which the convoy would have brought to them. When the Germans reached the Marne their men had only the cartridges in their pouches, and most of them were half-starving. The French and British turned upon them, and, aided by their foes' exhaustion, as much as by their own skill and courage, chased them back to the line of the Aisne River.

But for all this, poor little Belgium had to pay a heavy price. The news of the motor raid upon the convoy was received in Brussels with aston-

ishment by the German commanders. They had come to believe that the Belgian army was out of the reckoning as a factor of importance. Now they realized that there was still some fighting power left in the tired troops who had fallen back behind the protection of the Scheldt and the Nethe. The Germans acted with the promptness which is their greatest military virtue. The very day following the raid an overwhelming force of their troops appeared before Termonde, and, from the suburbs behind the town, Jack and Raoul watched the launching of the attack that was to lay the town in ashes.

First, the Germans opened with their artillery, raking the houses with shell fire so exactly as to make human life an impossibility within the area of the bombardment. Under cover of this fire their troops advanced and forced the Belgians out of their advanced positions, at last securing the ruins of the town. The Belgians retired sullenly across the Scheldt, where they were protected by the belt of gigantic forts surrounding Antwerp. Worn out as they were, the scanty regiments which had been fighting for a month without any let-up were in imperative need of a rest. And, realizing this need, King Albert reluctantly consented to abandon active operations for a week.

The Germans asked no more than to be let alone. They had all they wanted on their hands farther to the south. Consequently the two armies settled down to a desultory round of skirmishes, outpost actions, and picket fights, none of them of any particular importance. The boys actually knew what it was to have time hang heavy on their hands for several days; and they secured leave, with permission to go into Antwerp and hunt up Monsieur and Madame Heilleprin.

They found Raoul's parents without any difficulty, as the Heilleprins were stopping with cousins, the first people to whom Raoul had gone for information; and the old people were delighted to see the boys and assure themselves that they really were safe.

"To think of what you have been through!" exclaimed Madame Heilleprin, with tears in her eyes. "And you are only boys! Oh, it is terrible, terrible! What are we coming to? These are dreadful times."

"I'm afraid they are going to be worse, too," said Monsieur Heilleprin gloomily.

"Why, father, you don't think the Germans are going to be able to advance any farther?" said Raoul in surprise.

"Why not? Have you seen any sign of their being checked yet? What is to stop them, when they make up their mind that they wish to go farther?"

"You don't mean you think they will try to take Antwerp, do you, sir?" asked Jack.

"Why not? Why not, I say?" responded Monsieur Heilleprin. "We are few, now, we Belgians. They have taken most of our country away from us. The army has no field to recruit from. It is worn away, slowly, but surely. The Germans are pouring in new troops by the hundreds of thousands. We can expect no help from the French at this time. We have been warned of that. They have their plan, whatever it may be, and they will stick to it. They are right, too. This is a time when true patriots think not only of their own country, but of the world. For it is for the world that we Belgians are fighting, boys, for the liberties and happiness of all the peoples of the globe of every race and clime."

This was an unusually long speech for Monsieur Heilleprin to make, and the boys were accordingly impressed. Moreover, he made no attempt to hide his apprehensions; and Madame Heilleprin wept openly.

"But, sir," remonstrated Jack incredulously,

"surely you don't think the Germans could ever break into Antwerp? Why, the officers of the staff were telling us only yesterday of the two belts of forts around the city. The area inside the outer fortifications is more than two hundred square miles, and on certain sides it will be impossible for the Germans to approach, for we shall open the dikes and inundate the country. It would cost them scores of thousands of men to storm the outer forts, and then they would find themselves opposed by the second line of forts encircling the whole city."

"Yes, yes, Jack," returned Monsieur Heilleprin. "But have you forgotten what the great German siege mortars did to Liège? They will have the same effect upon the outer forts here if they are used—as I make no doubt they will be, as soon as the Germans have brought them back from France. I grant you our Field Army, small though it is, assisted by the waters of the rivers and the fortifications, will be able to hold off the Germans for a time, for weeks perhaps. But if the Germans are willing to pay the price in lives—and they always have been—then they will break through the outer forts. After that all they will have to do is to bombard the city over the inner forts. It will be only a question of time before

the citizens will compel the soldiers to capitulate, if the soldiers by themselves do not see the desirability of saving one of the most beautiful cities in the world from destruction."

As he talked, Monsieur Heilleprin walked rapidly up and down the room in considerable agitation. The boys were considerably downcast by what he said. They had lived in an atmosphere of such constant activity, and they had been so successful in the small undertakings of their own, that they had come to feel very sanguine of the outcome of the campaign. The initial retreats they had accepted philosophically as part of the game, but they had never doubted that presently the Germans would become wearied and the fight would turn the other way. Now they were told that defeat was their certain portion.

"Well, I can't help it," said Jack, after a few moments' consideration. "We'll fight as long as we can, won't we, Raoul?"

Raoul nodded his head. Monsieur Heilleprin laughed shortly.

"Your very words are an indication of our situation," he commented. "We are reduced to such straits that boys of your age are necessary to our resistance. Soon there will be no more Belgians,

if things go on in this way; they will all be killed off or prisoners in Germany.''

''What shall you do, father?'' inquired Raoul presently.

''I do not know,'' replied Monsieur Heilleprin. ''All the money I could scrape together I have sent to England, and if the worst comes to the worst, why, I suppose your mother and I will flee to England, too, as will every one else who has the means, beyond any doubt.''

''But you will stay with us, now, will you not, boys?'' pleaded Madame Heilleprin. ''You have done enough. Is that not so, husband?'' She appealed to Monsieur Heilleprin.

He shook his head sadly.

''I fear we have no right to take them from their duty, wife,'' he said. ''They are, after all, filling the places of two men, who, we will say, have died or been imprisoned for their country. Our lads have filled these places worthily, and surely Belgium needs them more than we do. They must go back.''

Madame Heilleprin wept a little more, and then set to work to see to it that there was plenty to eat for dinner. She resolved that even if she could not keep the boys with her she would give them a course of meals that would bolster them up to

stand much hard usage in the field. And throughout the balance of their stay, although Antwerp was practically a city besieged, she contrived to feed the boys as though she were stuffing them for some cannibal feast.

They were several pounds heavier when they returned to the outposts a week or so after the battle of Termonde. On August 30th, they learned, King Albert had resumed the offensive against the invaders, and now he was preparing to fling his reorganized army at the Germans all along the line. The boys found a spirit of optimism prevailing about Headquarters, and a change for the better in the general tone of the army, which had been markedly discouraged by its defeat at Termonde and other points during the latter half of August.

The boys reported at once to Baron de Quezonc, who did not look quite so plump as when they first saw him at Brussels. He greeted them kindly, but professed to be at a loss to find occupation for them worthy of their talents.

"Of course, there is plenty of message-carrying for every one who can run a motor-cycle," he said; "but I fancy you lads rather look down upon that, eh? That would be tame for two such veterans as you. But I don't see what else there

is, we are shut in so—stay, though. Wait here a minute."

He drew out a large-scale map of the country about Brussels that hung on the wall, and stood for some time in front of it whistling between his teeth, evidently abstracted by some problem.

"Do you see these lines that branch out to the south of Brussels?" he asked finally, indicating certain points on the map. "Well, those are railroads. There are seven of them, and along them the Germans are running troop and provision trains. We blew them up, but they have been repaired again. Now, how would you go about to destroy them a second time?"

The boys considered the question.

"Why, sir," suggested Jack, "it seems to me the best plan would be to work the same trick we did on the convoy. Gather a strong force of motor-cars, with plenty of explosives, and take advantage of a diversion by our troops to make a dash through the German lines."

"I think you have it," said the Baron. "We are contemplating a serious attack toward Brussels. If we prove strong enough, we hope to reoccupy the capital. But I am afraid we shall find ourselves hopelessly outnumbered. In that case, it will be well to have something to show for our

efforts, and what would be better than the destruction of the main arteries for supplying the Germans in France? They would be reduced to relying once more altogether upon motor-convoys."

"It could be done, sir, I'm pretty sure," Jack reasserted. "Don't you think so, Raoul?"

"Yes," agreed his chum. "With a strong column, and plenty of motor-cyclists to stand off Uhlans."

"You won't have much to fear from the Uhlans," returned de Quezonc. "The German cavalry, what's left of it, is in France. It's the infantry and guns you'll have to reckon with, and I think we can draw them elsewhere."

At a council that night the General Staff adopted the plan suggested by de Quezonc, and it was determined to push the attack without delay. The resources of the garrison in motor vehicles were well nigh exhausted to meet the demands of this plan, and numerous squadrons of armored cars and trucks were mobilized at a point near Termonde, where they could be thrown forward as soon as the Germans were thrust back upon Brussels. All this time, the Belgians developed their attack gradually, and by the 9th of September the Germans were distinctly worried.

On that day, a message was received by King Albert from the German government reiterating the offer to compromise with Belgium, return all her territory to her and indemnify her for her losses, if she would subscribe to the passage of German troops through Belgian territory to France. But to this offer, as to the similar one which had preceded the German declaration of war, King Albert returned a scornful refusal. So long as he held a foot of ground for the Belgian flag to float over, he said, he would resist to the utmost such a dishonorable proposal.

The same night, the Belgians pushed home their main attack, and on the tenth they swept forward irresistibly, driving the Germans out of Termonde, Malines, and Alost, making good their hold on the following day and chasing the enemy up to the environs of Brussels. This was precisely the diversion for which de Quezonc's automobile raiders were waiting, and they sallied out from Termonde on the evening of the tenth. Jack and Raoul rode with the advance-guard of motor-cycle troops. The country to the south of Brussels had been swept fairly clean of Germans, and the stray bodies the raiders encountered were helpless before the impetuous rush of the gasolene cavalry.

Once in the enemy's country, the column of automobiles broke up into several detachments, which followed designated routes and attacked certain specified railroad routes. Each column carried with it a truckload or two of guncotton, and the havoc they wrought in a few hours took the Germans several weeks of unrelenting work to make good again. Jack and Raoul saw little of the work of destruction, however. They were with the motor-cyclists who, with a brigade of lancers, had been detailed to form a covering screen between the raiders and Brussels. They had their work cut out for them.

Despite the trouncing they had received, the Germans came out boldly and fought sturdily to save their valuable lines of communication to the south. The Belgian motor-cycle battalions were few in number, and necessarily scattered over a wide front. Consequently it was not easy to keep up communications, and on the morning of the eleventh Jack and Raoul suddenly discovered, to their dismay, that they had been separated from the force they were attached to. During the night they had been sent by the officer commanding the covering troops with a message to the commander of the Belgian advance-guard, which was also the right wing. They had found

this officer after some difficulty, delivered their message, and, in starting on their return, were caught up in an engagement which raged about a small wood as the Germans advanced. In the darkness they had lost their way, and as best they could, they set out to retrace their course.

But each time they advanced in the right direction they ran upon the Germans and were obliged to turn and flee. Morning found them miles from Alost, and the firing in the distance told them that their comrades were in retreat with a wall of German soldiers intervening between them. Close at hand was a small village, and the boys cautiously trundled their machines along a lane which led to it. From the outskirts they studied its appearance and were soon satisfied that there were no Germans present. Nevertheless, as they entered the main street, a bullet flew over their heads and another pinged into the dust at Raoul's feet. Both of them were too well trained not to know what to do. They let their machines fall to the ground, and stood with hands up.

There was a rustling in the bushes, and two countrymen, sullen-faced and menacing, leaped out at them, rifles in one hand, scythes in the other.

"Ha, you German murderers, we've got you!"

snarled the leader. "We'll teach you to kill women and children and priests."

"Hold on," cried Raoul. "We're not Germans, we're Belgians."

The peasants hesitated.

"How do we know?" asked one, still unconvinced.

"Look in my pocket, if you don't believe me," returned Raoul promptly. "You'll find a pass. We're Belgian boys, detailed as messengers. We were with that column that was fighting over toward Brussels last night."

The Belgians read the pass, and the expressions of their faces changed instantly.

"Ah, little Messieurs!" exclaimed the first one. "How can we tell you how sorry we are? And you are so young, too, to be fighting such thieves as the Germans."

"Yes," chimed in the other. "They would show no mercy to you if they caught you. You are not regularly uniformed soldiers. They would put you up against a stone wall or bayonet you off-hand. That's what they'd do to my comrade and me if they caught us with rifles. But we're too clever for them. We hide the guns in the hay-stack, but every now and then a Uhlan comes along or a small patrol. Then we use the

guns. We hope to kill a German for every soul in our village they killed."

The eyes of both the men flashed as the fellow said this, and Jack and Raoul congratulated themselves that they were not Germans. They had heard tales of the sporadic guerilla warfare maintained against the invaders by the resentful peasantry, but this was the first incident of it which they had seen personally.

"Do you think you could guide us back to Alost?" asked Jack.

"I don't know," said the first peasant. "It is possible. But there is much danger."

"No more danger than staying here," returned Jack. "And why do two strong fellows like you stay here, when your King needs you and you can fight your country's battles in the open like men?"

The peasants looked sheepish.

"Have you any families?" demanded Jack.

"No," said one. "Our families have all died or fled. We have stayed only to keep the roof-trees on the old houses and to take vengeance."

"Well, you had far better come with us," Jack told him. "If you stay, sooner or later you will be caught."

The two hung their heads, quite abashed.

"What you say is true, Monsieur," admitted

the second one, after a pause. "Jules and I have been playing the poltroon, although we did not mean to. We will go with you, if you will take us, and we will join the King's army if he will take us. At least, we can shoot. We have had practice." He grinned savagely. "In the woods back there, if you cared to look, you would find what once were seven Germans."

"We'll take your word for that," answered Jack. "And now, are you ready to come?"

"Yes, Monsieur. But will you not stop for a bite of breakfast? We shall have a long, hard day's work before us."

The boys consented to this, but it was not long after sunrise when, in company with their new recruits, they set out upon the difficult feat of slipping through the German lines and regaining the Belgian position at Alost. At the advice of the peasants, they abandoned their motor-cycles, which were running out of gasolene and were awkward to handle in a situation where secrecy and celerity were more necessary than speed. Besides which considerations, the peasants were not mounted and could not have kept up with them awheel.

The guides were intimately acquainted with the countryside. They knew every wheel-rut almost,

and by past experience could tell where the German outposts would be situated. Traveling by woodland and shaded paths, crawling along ditches and on hands and knees through the nodding tassels of corn fields, the four made a devious and tedious way. Sometimes, it took them an hour to gain a mile, but they progressed steadily and without discovery. Darkness found them immediately behind the German advanced posts, with Alost only a couple of hours distant. The hardy peasants, trained to see as well at night as in the daytime, cat-footed and open-eared, each took one of the boys by the hand and led them silently between the German sentries where they were stationed at intervals of one hundred yards.

After that, the only incidents were the hail of the Belgian sentries outside of Alost, and the bother of convincing the officers who came to question them that they were what they claimed to be. It ended in their being hailed to Headquarters and the awakening of de Quezonc.

"I'm not surprised to see you," he said, as he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. "I'm never surprised at what you two do any more. Only tell me what news you have brought back this time?"

"We haven't brought back any news, sir," replied Raoul.

"No, but we have brought in two recruits who can shoot," added Jack, and he recounted the story of their meeting with the Belgian bush-whackers.

"Good," said de Quezonc, when the story was ended. "I'm not sure but what your trophies this time are worth more than a record of what's going on in the Kaiser's mind. After all, we know more or less what the Germans are up to. But what we need most is men, men, more men." He brought his fist down on his desk with a thump. "Men," he repeated, "more men. If we had a few thousand more we could accomplish it."

"Accomplish what, sir?" asked Jack.

"Recapture Brussels."

"Aren't we going to?" asked Raoul.

De Quezonc shook his head.

"It's impossible," he said. "We tried to advance to-day. To try to accomplish more would be folly. We shall hold on to what we have as long as that is possible, until the Germans are ready to attack. Then we must fall back. And our whole trouble is lack of men. With ten thousand more we might have taken Brussels; with fifty thousand more, we could smash the Germans and end the war. And all the reinforcements we have got are your two."

CHAPTER XIV

WITH DYNAMITE AND FUSE

It seemed to Jack and Raoul they had not slept an hour when they were aroused by an orderly. In fact, they had slept but five hours. Dawn was just beginning to break, but already the muttering of the cannon was sounding on the firing line. The orderly who aroused them brought steaming mugs of hot coffee, which they drank standing by the door of the building in which they were billeted. Strangely enough, the boys had not passed a night under canvas during the whole of their military experience. In a country like Belgium, thickly settled, armies did not bother to carry canvas with them, because there were always plenty of buildings in which the soldiers might find shelter.

While the boys waited at Headquarters an aeroplane buzzed down from overhead, and presently the aviator and observation officer, wrapped up in fur and leather coats, despite the summer heat, disappeared inside the building given up to the

Staff. Five minutes afterward the Baron de Quezonc came out, and, noticing the boys, beckoned them over to him.

"Well, we have done something," he said. "That aviation scout reports that three reserve corps on their way into France from Germany to reinforce von Kluck have been recalled to reinforce the troops opposite us."

"When will they get here?" asked Jack.

De Quezonc shrugged his shoulders.

"In two days—possibly even by to-morrow. They are coming up by train and motor-transport."

"Is there anything for us to do, sir?" inquired Raoul.

"Nothing at present, except to stand by to carry any orders or messages for the Staff."

Most of that day the boys stood idly about Headquarters and viewed the battle from afar. Now and then one or other of them was dispatched to some point along the wide front with orders, but even then they did not get any closer to the fighting than the supporting batteries. Still, they saw enough to appreciate that the German attack was developing with cumulative force—that is to say, the Germans were being strengthened steadily at every point and were attacking with con-

stantly increasing fervor. Their guns, at first barely able to hold their own with the Belgian artillery, presently showed full ability to reply, and by mid-afternoon were commencing to establish a mastery.

Long before the evening the Belgians were falling back from their advance posts around Alost, and the shattered town was again relinquished to the custody of the invaders. The Belgians had left the railroad track toward Brussels intact when they first captured Alost, thinking that they might need it if they were successful in their attempts to regain the capital. Shortly after noon Jack watched a party of engineers march up to the right-of-way a short distance from the town and start in to undermine the roadbed, evidently with the intention of blowing it up, so that it would not be of any use to the Germans.

As he watched the preparations an idea entered his head, and he carried it straightway to de Quezonc, who, much impressed, in turn communicated it to General de Guise, who was in command under the King. General de Guise gave his assent to it, and the engineers were called off their work and their energies directed to an entirely different enterprise. While Jack and Raoul, with Baron de Quezonc, stood by and watched, the engineers,

"YOU ARE YOUNG FOR SUCH AN HONOR," HE SAID GRAVELY

with the assistance of some men from the ordnance department, made up a train of heavy freight cars, which they loaded with dynamite, shells, and grenades. A locomotive was hitched onto the cars, and they were hauled off the siding, on which they stood, onto the main line and run a short distance out of town back toward the Scheldt and the line of the Belgians' retreat.

Alost was evacuated in due course, but the battle raged on with scarcely any diminution. Night came, and still Germans and Belgians fought on. Searchlights swept across the desolated waste of open country and villages that stretched between the Scheldt and Alost. Sometimes the lurid glare of a star shell would light up a small area, revealing the advance of a body of the foe. As the Belgians retired, the train of explosives also retired, keeping well behind the firing line, out of reach of a stray shell. Jack and Raoul had mounted into the cab of the locomotive, along with the military engineer who drove it; and they waited impatiently for the signal which would put their plan in execution.

It was ten o'clock in the evening before word was flashed back from the firing line that the condition they were seeking had been established. A

motor-cyclist zizzed up alongside the locomotive, braked and hailed the figures in the cab.

"Is this the explosives train?" demanded the courier.

"Yes," answered the engineer officer in charge, stepping from the shadows by the locomotive.

"Very well, sir," replied the courier. "You are ordered to go ahead. The Germans have just run a trainload of reserve ammunition into the station at Alost. Hark, you can hear the whistle."

As he spoke, the bombardment, which had been dying down for a half hour past, ceased almost entirely. There was only the sporadic popping of rifles, and now and then the bellow of a bursting shell, and in this interval of comparative silence, they heard quite distinctly the far-off shrilling of a locomotive whistle, as if a train was signaling for a crossing.

The engineer officer nodded, and waved his hand to the military engineer in the cab.

"Let her go," he said.

"Yes, sir."

And the engineer pushed the throttle over and released the brakes—a very little, at first, so that the wheels just began to move, and the train ground slowly along.

"I'll take her so up to that signal post a couple

of hundred yards up," he said to Jack and Raoul, who were watching him eagerly. "Then I'll let her out a bit, and by the green signalman's house beyond I'll shove the lever clear over. Be ready for that. You two jump out the right side. I'll take the left."

He did as he said. The train picked itself up at the signal post, and as it came opposite the signalman's hut suddenly shot forward uncontrolled, all steam on, brakes open. The engineer jumped to the left. Jack and Raoul, one after the other, sprang like cats out of the right gangway and landed without mishap in the soft grass at the foot of the slight embankment. They scrambled to their feet, and watched the disappearing bulk of the train, lunging forward into the night with ever-increasing speed, dark and menacing like some huge monster rushing down upon a helpless prey. In two minutes it was out of sight, but they heard a chorus of yells as it shot by a Belgian picket. Another chorus greeted its appearance in the German lines, and then it seemed that bedlam was let loose.

The Germans, of course, thought the train was armored and was sallying out on a raid, and they turned every gun upon it. Bullets crashed into the cars, mostly without effect. A few dynamite

cartridges in one car exploded, cutting the train in two, and blowing up the locomotive and a good part of the surrounding country. But the echo of this explosion was nothing compared to the thunderous blast that shook the ground underfoot as the remaining half of the train, running "wild cat," as the trainmen say, crashed into the ammunition train which the Germans had just run into the Alost station.

Jack and Raoul and the engineers around them were thrown off their feet. The signalman's shanty close beside them was shattered to pieces. One second they saw a vast sheet of flame leaping on the horizon, and five seconds later they were scrambling to their feet, deafened and bewildered. Their ruse had worked to perfection. Not only was the track most effectually destroyed, but a good many Germans had been killed in the enterprise, and there was no chance of a resumption of the night attack until more ammunition had been brought up.

Toward morning, however, the Germans resumed the attack. In the intervening hours they had been heavily reinforced, and aeroplane reconnaissance demonstrated clearly that all three of the reserve corps they had been waiting for had come up to the firing line. This meant that the

Belgians were now outnumbered by two to one, but they fought on just as pluckily as before. The German strategy was aiming at crushing the Belgian right flank, centering on Termonde and still holding on to the right bank of the Scheldt, and during the morning they concentrated more and more of their troops against this part of the Belgian line.

The regiments and batteries defending Termonde were subjected to a relentless battering at the hands of constantly reinforced columns of Germans. Assaults were beaten off again and again, but each time the enemy gained a few feet. By mid-day the Belgians were worn out, and some corps were beginning to show signs of demoralization. They had confidently expected reinforcements as soon as the severity of the attack leveled against them became known; but the truth was, the Belgians were having all they could do to hold their other positions along the line of the Dyle, and the left wing could not spare any help for the sorely hammered right.

Jack and Raoul were sent to Termonde with urgent appeals for reinforcements by officers they met at the front while they were delivering orders from General de Guise. They reached Termonde, delivered the messages, and were dispatched

back by Baron de Quezonc, with instructions to all officers to retire slowly, disputing every foot of the ground. It was impossible to send more aid, he said.

But before the boys were within a mile of the firing line they encountered considerable numbers of stragglers who told them the fight was going badly, that the Germans were winning everywhere, and the Belgians were in danger of being flanked and thrown into the river behind them. That this report was true, even if exaggerated, the boys soon discovered, when they came upon the whole Belgian line in full retreat, fighting back at the Germans, but rapidly degenerating into a rout. Soldiers slipped away from the firing line every minute. Some batteries had been obliged to abandon their guns for want of horses to haul them, but the boys saw one handful of artillerymen, who, despite their plight, were making every endeavor to save their beloved guns by hand.

In sight of Termonde, this mass of fugitives broke pell-mell across country for the bridges that led to safety. Had it not been that the Germans were almost as weary as their enemies, they might have created a great deal more havoc than they did. As it was, they pounded

the Belgians with shrapnel, and pushed their infantry on the heels of the retreating troops. King Albert and his staff had discovered the impending disaster almost as soon as it broke, and they were prompt on the spot, organizing a covering line formed of the first fugitives to come in and such special-service troops as could be mustered, with all the artillery at hand. With these he essayed to give some protection to the retreating columns and allow them a chance to pass the river.

Officers did their best to bring some degree of order into the mobs converging upon the bridges, and Jack and Raoul, who had dropped behind, found the crossing going on in a fairly disciplined manner when it was their turn to pass over. But to the surprise of the boys, nobody seemed to give a thought to what would happen after they were all across. There were no engineer troops in the vicinity of this particular bridge, and no preparations were being made to place it in such a condition as to hinder the Germans from following the Belgians.

This was no business of the Scouts, however, They made their way to the Staff, reported to Baron de Quezonc and then stood to watch the unfolding of the last act of the drama. The Belgian troops that had retreated were fully ashamed

of themselves by now, and they readily reformed and assumed new positions on the slight rise overlooking the river valley. In the meantime, too, Belgian batteries had been established and opened fire upon the Germans, forcing the infantry to cover and checking temporarily the attack of the German batteries. One by one, then, the several pontoon bridges and permanent structures heaved up and splashed into the stream as the charges placed by the engineers were detonated. But by some accident, the principal bridge, by which the boys had crossed, a massive structure of steel on the cantilever model, with room for trolley tracks, foot and wagon ways, was untouched.

The alert Germans soon perceived this, and they switched all their energies to an attempt to gain possession of it. A large force of infantry burrowed into the houses commanding it from their bank of the river, while their artillery from every shelter within a range of several miles poured shells upon the Belgian approaches to it. The next step was the thrusting forward of a strong column of infantry, who advanced to a trot in close formation, singing and shouting, in a reckless dash across the open. But the Belgians stopped this effort in short order; the head of the column

withered away and shredded off under a terrible fusillade.

A shout of exultation went up from the Belgians as it retired, but they were answered with yells of defiance by the Germans and a bombardment of greater ferocity than ever before. De Quezonc and the officers of the staff looked worried.

"They failed that time, but they'll get across yet," commented the Baron, as he studied the situation through his field glasses.

"What could have been the matter with the engineers?" demanded another officer. "They must have been mad."

Jack twitched Raoul by the arm and led him to one side. "You heard that?" he said significantly. "Well, come along. I know where the engineers' reserve magazine is."

In fifteen minutes Jack had ingratiated himself into the confidences of the sergeant in command of the magazine. Five minutes later he and Raoul were setting off with a supply of dynamite sufficient to blow up the whole German army if the charge could be applied right. They were also provided with a small portable electric battery and a few feet of wire to connect with the detonators. This was all they wanted. The next move on their program was to get to the bridge.

Jack had not framed his plan without taking a look at the geographical lay of the ground they must traverse. On the Belgian side of the river there were numerous houses in ruins, and up to the houses cover could be found in a straggling patch of underbrush and alders, considerably torn by shell fire, but still thick enough to conceal the cautious movements of two boys.

The boys were further aided by a shallow gulley leading down toward the river, of which they made use to gain the wooded patch. Here, too, they rested and reconnoitered the ground ahead of them again. Germans and Belgians were exchanging a desultory fire, and every now and then the Germans would drop a shell or two at the Belgian end of the bridge. But there seemed no reason why they should not be able to pass unseen from where they were right up to the approach to the bridge. The danger would arise after they had gained the bridge and were crouching down to place their charges in the open.

They talked over the task ahead of them, and mapped out every step of it. The battery they arranged to leave in the last bit of cover next to the bridge, a ruined inn. On their dash to the bridge each was to carry a coil of wire, which he would unroll as he ran, until the center of the

bridge was gained. Then they would kneel, one on each side, fix the cartridges and make for shelter. Jack wanted Raoul to stay behind and attend to the battery, while he went forward and fixed both the cartridges. But Raoul objected strenuously to this plan, and they ended by arranging that both should go forward, and the first one back should press the electric switch which would explode the detonators.

Their study of woodcraft came in handy during their progress toward the bridge. Part of the way on hands and knees, seeking shelter in every ruined wall and fence, they reached the ruined inn close to sunset, when the shadows were lengthening and the light was uncertain, a factor greatly to their advantage, of course. The battery was adjusted on a footstool just inside the door of the inn; and Jack, whose mining experience had taught him something of explosives, proceeded to arrange the charges. He bound the cartridges in loose packs, so that they could readily be adjusted to lap over the bridge and under a truss which supported the center span. This required several minutes, and then all was ready for the final dash.

"When I count three, run," said Jack, as they stole up to the inn doorway.

Across the river the Germans were firing less and less frequently, and their artillery was stilled altogether.

"One—two—three," counted Jack.

And like hunted deer the two boys streaked out of the shattered doorway, and tore for the bridge. It was some time before their slight figures, running low through the shadows, were spotted by the Germans. Several faint yells reached their ears, then the advanced skirmishers opened fire. As the boys gained the bridge, a perfect storm of magazine rifle fire burst upon them. Nickel-tipped bullets pinged on the steel beams and splintered the wooden flooring or "wheeted" overhead.

In the Belgian lines the sudden resumption of firing was not understood at first, but when the two figures were discerned on the bridge a cheer went up, and every gun and rifle was opened up to give the boys a chance for their lives. Jack and Raoul paid no attention to the activities of friend or foe. They were bound up in the matter they had in hand. Moreover, once in the center of the bridge they had some protection, because each dodged behind a huge upright steel beam which formed the central brace of the cantilever, to affix the cartridges and adjust the firing wire.

By this time, though, the German artillerists in

the rear had been notified of what was going on over the field telephone, and the racket of the rifles and machine guns which were drumming at the bridge was dominated by the whirr and spatter of shrapnel shells which were sprayed over the length of the structure. In the midst of this tornado of death Jack and Raoul went calmly about their business. They carefully packed the cartridges around the central brace, adjusting them in such a way that the force of the explosion would be exerted in every direction and the fabric of the bridge torn completely asunder.

Jack, being somewhat more skillful than Raoul, was the first to have his charge adjusted, and he started for the bridge end at a run, with a warning yell to his chum. He had not gained the land when it seemed to him that the whole world was going to pieces about his ears. He was conscious of a tremendous roar overhead, a streak of crimson light, and then a huge, bellowing cloud of jet-black choking smoke. He came to himself, coughing and strangling, to find Raoul bending over him.

"They pitched a howitzer shell just ahead of you," shouted Raoul. "Can you get up? This is stifling. We can't stand it much longer. Make

a try, old man, before this smoke puts me down and out.''

Jack responded to his chum's efforts and tottered to his feet. He felt very weak and sick, and his head was spinning round, but with Raoul to support him he started at a wavering run toward the ruined inn. In itself the big shell had been rather a benefit than a harm to them. It had cast such a cloud of dense chemical smoke over the Belgian end of the bridge that the boys were hidden to their enemies until they were almost within shelter. Just as they reached the door, Jack staggered a little and pitched forward, and as he did so Raoul saw that his arm was bleeding.

''Wounded,'' muttered the Belgian lad. ''Well, I can't help it. I've got to fire that charge.''

He propped Jack up against the wall and turned to the battery. As he did so, he glanced out the window and saw a swarm of German infantrymen advancing from the village street across the river upon the bridge—and he held his hand. Under a fierce fire from the Belgians on the heights the Germans pushed forward without wavering. Many fell, but the head of the column gained the bridge and pressed on. Raoul let them reach the exact center of the structure. Then he gently

pushed the switch over. There was a click—and the shivering tumult of the dynamite stormed upward to the sky, reddened with the glow of the sunset.

The great steel bridge sprang apart and showered its fabric over the river. Parts of it fell from the abutments at either end into the stream, but the middle span was simply rent into fragments and hurtled right and left. That section of the German column which escaped beat a hasty retreat, and a brief peace settled down upon the bloody scene. Raoul picked himself up from the heap of dust and masonry into which he had been thrown and extricated his senseless chum from a similar pile.

Jack was bleeding less, now, and with a handkerchief Raoul made shift to bandage the wound. He found some water, too, and dashed this in Jack's face, and in a short while the American boy was sitting up and asking what had happened. A brief rest restored Jack's strength, and when darkness fell he was able to accompany Raoul back to the Belgian lines. They followed the same route they had taken in starting upon their adventure, and reached Headquarters without any trouble. But they had scarcely settled down, after dispatching an orderly for some supper and a

surgeon to fix Jack's wound, when de Quezonc appeared.

"Well, restless ones," he remarked, "I think I had the honor of seeing one of your exploits this afternoon."

The boys looked sheepish. They were not sure whether they were going to get a wigging or praise.

"Am I correct?" continued the Baron.

"If you mean about the bridge—yes," returned Raoul a little defiantly.

De Quezonc smiled.

"All right, come with me," he said.

"But——" They looked at their smoke-blackened faces and the bloody bandages on Jack's arm.

"Oh, never mind that," the Baron reassured them. "The party who has asked to see you won't object."

"Who is he?" asked Jack as they followed him.

"Never mind."

They were led to the house set aside as Staff Headquarters, a plain farmhouse, deserted by its owners. In the kitchen several officers were writing or telephoning and a sentry stood at the door.

"Are these your men, Baron?" asked one of the officers. "If so, you can go right in."

The Baron opened a door leading to the inte-

rior of the house, and pushed the boys through, merely remarking:

"These are the young men you requested to see, your Majesty."

To their amazement Jack and Raoul were standing in the presence of King Albert himself. He regarded them a trifle humorously, with a kindly look in his eyes.

"Well, well," he said. "I've seen both of you before. You're the heroes of Louvain—and the raid on the convoy the other day. Won't you shake hands?"

They shook hands stiffly, not knowing what was to come next.

"One of you is wounded, I see," resumed the King. "That's too bad." His manner became serious. "That was a splendid feat you boys performed this afternoon. It was not only important in its correction of an error that might have proved fatal to us, but it came at a time when it had a marked effect upon the morale of our army. It cheered up the soldiers who had just been defeated. It was a clean-cut, splendid piece of work. Attention!"

The boys stood rigid, eyes to the front. The King took two little leather boxes from a table beside them.

"You are young for such an honor," he said gravely, "but that is all the more reason why you will appreciate it. I am decorating you each with the Military Medal for valor."

He pinned the medals onto their blouses as he spoke. Then he saluted.

"Comrades, I congratulate you."

CHAPTER XV

THE FALL OF ANTWERP

After this exploit, Jack was invalided to the rear, and Raoul was sent along to keep him company. Consequently the boys saw nothing of the Germans' attempt to break the outer line of forts by storming Fort Waelhem on September 15th, an attempt which was defeated with a loss to the invaders of 8,000 killed and wounded. On this day, too, the Belgians cut the dikes on the Scheldt, Rupel, and Nethe rivers and flooded a vast area of country. Some of the Germans were caught in the rush of waters, and many men and horses were drowned, while some guns, which they were shifting to bringing to bear upon the Belgian defenses, were sucked down into the morasses artificially created.

This lesson served to teach the Germans that Antwerp could not be carried off-hand by assault. They gathered in their forces, brought up ammunition and supplies, and prepared to await the arrival of the great 42-centimeter guns from

France. So the hard-pressed Belgians had a respite of ten days. To Jack and Raoul, who, of course, had full liberty to ramble at will within the area of the entrenched camp of Antwerp, it seemed as if the Germans must be crazy to even think of capturing it.

Fifty years before this, General Brialmont, the great Belgian miltary engineer—perhaps the greatest defensive engineer since Vauban, the Frenchman who revolutionized the art of war in the seventeenth century—had been commissioned to refortify Antwerp, in those days simply protected by a massive wall such as used to defend Paris. Brialmont erected in its place, at a great distance from the outskirts of the city, a ring of tremendous earthworks, interspersed with powerful forts, and also a ring of detached forts about two miles in advance of these works. Each of the detached forts had a front of 700 yards and mounted 15 howitzers and 120 rifled cannon. As there were nine of the detached forts, this meant that they mounted 1,080 pieces of ordnance—and this is not counting the artillery mounted on the inner continuous line of defenses. Altogether, Antwerp was defended by more than 4,000 guns. Moreover, around this inner line, entirely encircling the city, as well as around each of the de-

tached forts, was a ditch 150 feet broad and with 20 feet depth of water in it.

Besides this elaborate system of defenses, the boys discovered that since Brialmont's time his outer forts had been connected by a second continuous wall, fifteen miles long and fronted by a ditch similar to that around the forts themselves. Not content with this provision, the Belgian engineers had recently erected a third line of defense, so far distant from the suburbs of the city as to protect it against long-range guns, consisting of 25 large detached forts and 13 redoubts. Within this third circle of works was an area of about 200 square miles.

Jack and Raoul declined to believe that any army could force this triple chain of walls, but the Baron de Quezonc refused to agree with them.

"That is all very well," he said. "But you must remember that a wall is as strong as its weakest part. Let the Germans batter down one of our forts, and then they will be able to batter down all. They have only to get inside the first line of works to be able to bombard the city, and that will mean surrender in short order. Nothing can be gained by the ruin of Antwerp."

In this opinion the Baron coincided with Monsieur Heilleprin, who took as gloomy a view of

the situation as ever, but refused to leave. Indeed, few of the population of Antwerp cared to abandon their homes as yet. It seemed impossible to them that the Germans could ever menace their safety. They put the same faith and trust in their triple walls as did Jack and Raoul. Throughout the early days of the siege the population went about their affairs much as usual, and scenes in the streets did not reflect the unnatural conditions that prevailed. It was only the military men who foresaw what must happen.

On September 25th, the guns began to thunder again along the line of the Nethe, where the Germans were developing a serious attack, with the object of breaking through the outer circle of forts where it was weakest. Jack's arm was healed sufficiently to permit his employment as a messenger again, so the boys reported for duty in time to participate in the last phase of the Belgians' heroic resistance. As they left the city in an automobile for Waterloo, where Headquarters had been established, the streets were crowded with people who stood in groups, hands cupped to their ears, listening to the sullen booming of the cannon miles distant by the Nethe.

The Germans had chosen to assault this face of the fortress because to the north they were ham-

pered by the imminence of the Dutch frontier, while to the south the Belgian forts were covered by the extensive inundation caused by the release of the Rupel from its banks. Still farther south their advance was barred by the main channel of the Scheldt and a vast tract of inundated country. Therefore the logical point for them to break through was that constituting the left wing of the Belgian defenders, keyed on Forts Broechem, Waelhem, Wavre-Ste. Catherine, Konighoyck, and Lierre. Here they massed their big guns and a force of infantry at least twice as strong as the Belgians could oppose to them.

The fighting was hammer-and-tongs work. The Germans thrust remorselessly for the passage of the Nethe, the natural moat which interfered between them and the chain of outer forts, the while their great howitzers hurled shells that weighed a ton against the steel and concrete walls of the fortifications. As at Liège, it soon appeared that it was only a question of time before the forts would crumble away under such projectiles. At last, about the first of October, in desperation, the Belgian government appealed to the British government for aid. The garrison was becoming so weak that it was not sufficient to man all the defenses.

On the morning of October 3d, as Jack and Raoul were carrying dispatches to Fort Lierre, they were amazed to hear British cheering, and before they knew it they ran right into a column of British marines, standing in open order, awaiting the order to advance to the trenches. They learned that 8,000 British bluejackets and marines had reached Antwerp that morning and were now relieving some of the weary Belgian troops in the advanced trenches along the Nethe on the left of the assaulted position.

But the boys soon realized that the help came too late. With their long-range naval guns and an armored train they speedily put in action on a track which ran parallel with the German position, the British offered a splendid defense and utterly disconcerted the German attack; but the point of prime importance was the effect of the German howitzers on the Belgian forts. By October 5th, Forts Waelhem, Wavre-Ste. Catherine, and Konighoyck had been overpowered, and the fort of Lierre was silenced. Only Fort Broechem continued to bellow defiance at the assailants; and now the Germans were able to give their whole attention to this last key to the situation.

They made their principal effort on the early morning of the 6th, after a day spent in prepara-

tion. By a vigorous bombardment and a feint against the British position on the left, they diverted attention to this quarter. But they threw the main weight of their advance across the Nethe through the village of Duffel, which lies midway between Wavre and Lierre. Under a covering fire that pounded the luckless Belgian defenders to the earth, their engineers threw over a pontoon bridge, which was crossed in the darkness. When morning dawned, there was nothing for the Belgians to do but fall back, protected by the fire of their British allies and the armored train operated by the sailors.

With the Nethe in their possession, the Germans brought their big guns across and placed them in a position whence they could hammer Fort Broechem from the flank. On October 7th, after twenty-four hours of this treatment, the fort was a mass of ruins, and all its guns were out of service. Despite their bitter resistance, the Belgians were everywhere crowded back upon their second line of defense, the connected outlying forts and earthworks erected by General Brialmont in the days before artillery had attained a range of seven or eight miles. In other words, as Baron de Quezone had predicted, the doom of Antwerp was sealed.

Although the general public in the city did not yet fully realize the ordeal they were about to go through, the Belgian government indicated its appreciation of the situation by removing to Ostend a few hours after the reduction of Fort Broechem. That same day a messenger arrived from the German general, bearing a warning that bombardment of the city would be commenced at midnight of the 7th unless Antwerp surrendered. In the dearth of motor-cyclist troops to escort this man into the Town Hall, where King Albert had removed his Headquarters, General de Guise selected Jack and Raoul to ride with the automobile.

So they arrived in time to witness the real agony of Antwerp, the agony of a great city beside itself with fear. The impossible had come to pass, the citizens realized. The Germans were actually at their gates. Within a few hours the German shells would be falling in their streets; their houses would come crashing about their ears. There was a mad rush for the water front and the ferries to the Dutch frontier. Every steamer, tugboat, and sailing vessel, down to the smallest rowboats and barges, was put in commission. Boatmen charged fabulous sums for a charter to the nearest Dutch port. Still other thousands of frightened citizens fled by land to Ostend, along

the route parallel with the Dutch frontier, which was later to be followed by the Belgian army in its reluctant evacuation of its last stronghold.

Through these scenes the German messenger rode with his eyes bandaged, a grim smile on his lips. At the Town Hall he delivered his ultimatum to the military governor; the King did not care to see him. He was told there was no answer and sent back as he had come. Jack and Raoul rode with him to Termonde, the outlying position still held by the Belgians, thanks to their destruction of the bridge; and for this reason the boys missed the horror of that first night of terror in the city when the shells began to fall.

They were awakened from their sleep soon after midnight by the clamor, however, and they stood with other soldiers of the Belgian garrison that held the line of the Scheldt, staring across country at the great sheets of flame that rose from Antwerp as buildings were ignited by the incendiary shells cast by many of the German guns. The fires raged so fiercely that the whole sky was crimsoned with them, and in far-away Holland the country people of the frontier villages stood at their doors and listened to the grumble of guns and watched the tossing flames that were Ger-

many's punishment to Antwerp because she fought for freedom.

But the garrison of Termonde did not stare idly for long. Before morning the Belgian troops on the Scheldt had their hands full. For six days, now, the Germans had been attacking them almost as viciously as they had attacked the forts of the Nethe; and the fall of Fort Broechem had permitted the transfer of some of the giant howitzers to a point opposite Termonde. In the gray dawn of October 8th, while Antwerp shivered in its cellars or fought piteously for room on crowded vessels at the quays, these guns opened fire and fresh masses of German infantry advanced to the assault.

Outnumbered as they were, the Belgians fought back with determination, but their artillery could not reply effectually and they were unable to prevent the enemy's passage of the river. Late in the afternoon of the 8th the Belgians were fairly out-maneuvered, and what remained of their forces retreated upon Lokeren, while Jack and Raoul were dispatched into Antwerp with a full report of this latest disaster. Disaster was a mild word to describe it by. So long as the Belgians held the line of the Scheldt they had a clear road of retreat to Ghent, Bruges, and Ostend open

for them; but with Germans across the river at Termonde it was only a question of hours before this road would be barred—in which case the alternatives for the garrison would be surrender or flight to Holland and internment for the war.

"Our message is for the King himself," said Jack, a little importantly as the Baron de Quezonc hailed them when they hurried into the Hotel de Ville upon their arrival from Lokeren.

De Quezonc smiled. There was a sly twinkle in his eye.

"Is that so?" he said. "Well, his Majesty is engaged just at present. A countryman of yours," he added to Jack.

"Humph," said Jack. "These papers are important."

"His Majesty already has the necessary details by telephone," explained the Baron. "But I don't doubt you'll be summoned in a very little while."

As he spoke, the door to the King's office opened, and an aide-de-camp appeared. He beckoned to the boys to enter.

They passed through an anteroom and by another doorway into the King's private office. Here the first person they saw was the King himself. Another tall figure stood with his back to them, looking out of a window at the suburbs of the city

where the German shells were bursting frequently and burning oil tanks were sending up volumes of black smoke. The King smiled cordially at them.

"You have dispatches from Lokeren, I hear," he said. "Is it as bad there as the telephone messages indicate?"

"It is pretty bad, your Majesty," Jack started to say. But almost before the words were out of his lips he broke off with a cry of astonishment. The tall figure by the window had turned at sound of his voice, and he saw that he was facing his father.

"Dad!" Jack gasped involuntarily. "Where on earth did you——?"

But he remembered all at once that he was a soldier making a report to his commanding officer —who was a King, at that—and he straightened to attention, as did Raoul beside him, and prepared to go on with his reply. The King laughed.

"Don't stand on ceremony, my lad," he said kindly. "I asked your father to wait in here to see you as soon as de Quezonc sent in word that you had arrived. Now, you go over and talk to him while your comrade answers my questions."

So Jack found his hand clasped tight in his father's and his father's keen blue eyes staring down at him, measuring his figure and summing

up the evidence of failure or accomplishment that is written in every young face. Jack stared back, partly because he knew his father liked him to and partly because he honestly wasn't afraid. He had a clean slate, and although he probably wouldn't have told you so in so many words, 'way down inside of himself he knew it.

"You've done well, son," said Mr. Morton. "I've heard great things of you, but even if I had not, I'd be glad to see you looking so fit." He touched the bandage Jack still wore about his wounded arm. "Not bad, I hope?"

"No, sir. It's almost well. But how on earth did you get here?"

"Well, I began to worry a little about you when I heard how things were going here in Belgium, so I decided to come over and look you up. I reached London just in time to hear that Antwerp was besieged, so I got busy with Ambassador Page and some other people I knew there, chartered a yacht and steamed over here, with all kinds of passports, credentials and special papers, to find you and our good friends the Heilleprins and bring you all and as many more poor people as we can accommodate to safety."

The King had completed his interrogation of Raoul, and now he joined Mr. Morton and Jack.

"Your offer is most kind, sir," he said. "But I do not think there is any use in attempting a systematic effort to find people who can't get away otherwise than through your efforts. The confusion is too great, and the authorities have more to attend to than they can manage, as it is. The best thing for you to do is to have your Belgian friends pass the word around among their acquaintances that you are sailing and have room for so many."

"Very well, sir, I will do that, then," replied Mr. Morton. "I do not suppose I can offer you a passage?"

"Indeed, no." The King's voice was decisive. "I shall stay with my army, and my army will not surrender. So long as there is an inch of Belgian territory over which our flag waves, so long shall we continue our resistance against Prussian militarism, and after that, too, if necessary."

"Then you expect to escape, sir?" asked Mr. Morton, with interest.

"Certainly," answered King Albert. "We shall begin a withdrawal early to-morrow morning toward Ostend. The British troops on the French frontier already are thrusting forward a covering force to protect our movement, and I have no doubt we shall succeed, although it is prob-

able quite a few of our men will be forced over the frontier into Holland. But most of the army will escape, and the Germans will find that Belgium is a long way from being conquered."

"That is the right spirit, your Majesty," exclaimed Mr. Morton. "I wish I was a trifle younger myself. I should like to be with you."

"But your son and his friend? Shall you leave them with us? Of course, they are at liberty to go, if you deem it best. But look at them. Are they not improved? Leave them to me, sir, and I will make men of them, men their fathers will always have cause to be proud of, men bred in a hard school of adversity such as has tried no people since the Dutch threw out Alva and his Spaniards."

Mr. Morton looked uncomfortable.

"That is very kind of you, sir," he said. "But as a matter of fact I have just promised Monsieur and Madame Heilleprin that we should take both of them back to London with us."

The King smiled his acquiescence.

"Perhaps that is just as well," he said. "There will be no big fighting for some weeks yet, so far as we are concerned. Take them to London and give them the rest they deserve. But do not let

them forget that they have won the title of Cadets of Belgium. And should you decide to permit them to return to service, remember that my staff is open to them—or to yourself, sir.''

The King bowed, and the interview was at an end.

As they made their way through the streets toward the quay, occasionally dodging shells, both Jack and Raoul conjured up for the last time the memories of the exciting weeks they had just passed through.

''Gosh,'' said Jack, when his father pointed out to him the yacht on which they were to sail to England. ''It doesn't seem as if it could be all over, does it, Raoul?''

''No,'' replied Raoul. ''And maybe it isn't, either.''

The next morning, while the Belgian army was blowing up the forts and evacuating the city and the rain of German shells still continued, Mr. Morton's yacht dropped down the Scheldt, loaded to the guards with homeless refugees. They made an uneventful voyage across the North Sea to the mouth of the Thames, convoyed by English destroyers, and landed safely two days later.

THE END